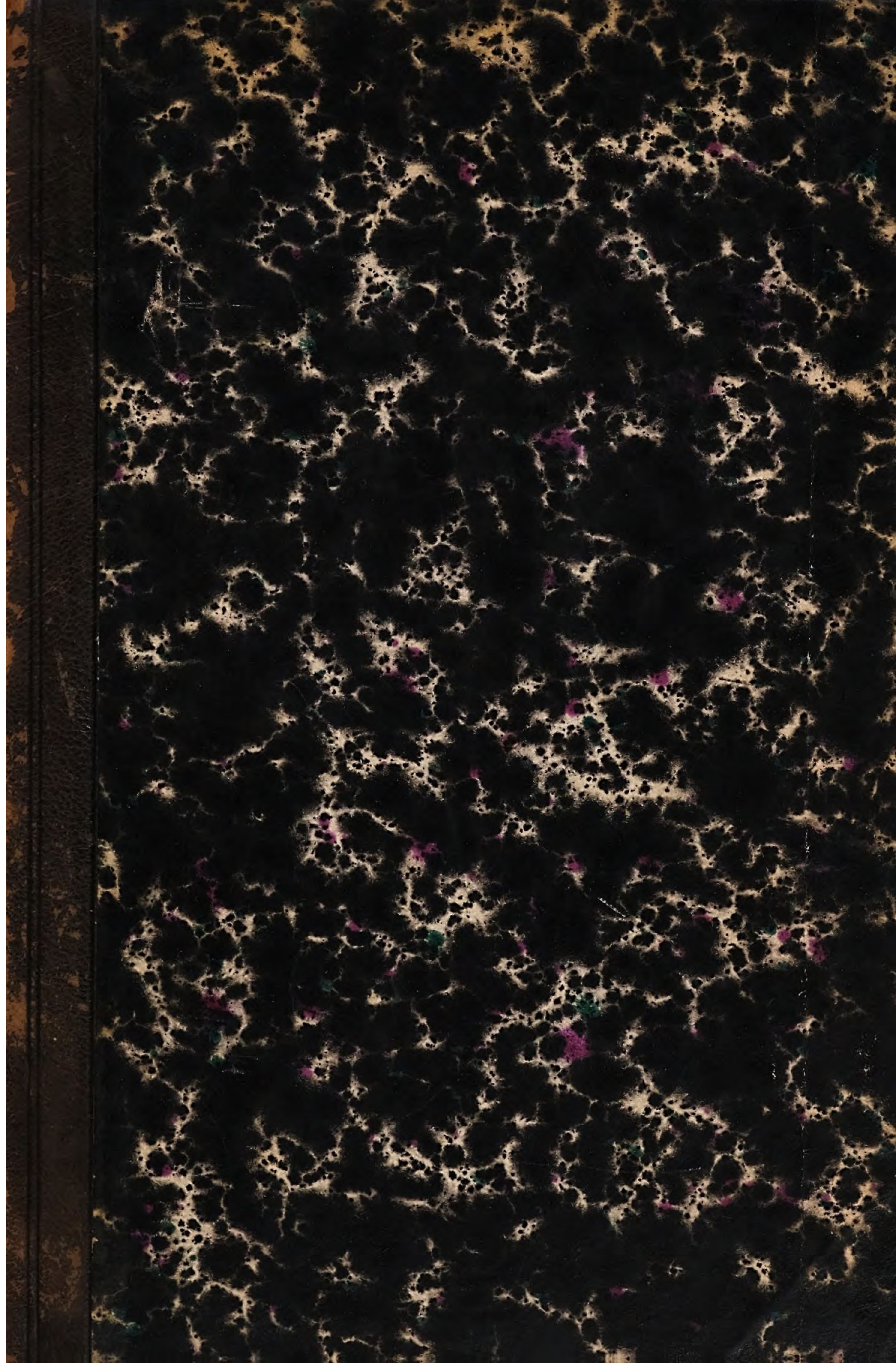




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VOL. 181.

JOSEPH'S COAT

BY

D. CHRISTIE MURRAY,
Author of "A Life's Atonement".

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

HAMBURG.

KARL GRÄDENER & J. F. RICHTER.
1882.

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JOSEPH'S COAT.

PROLOGUE.

CHAPTER I.

OLD JOE and young Joe, sturdy sire and lissome son, trudged through the dust together—old Joe bent down a little earthwards, and going rather like a carthorse; young Joe with his head well up, and stepping like a hunter that can carry weight. I see them in my mind's eye, as in a picture. Old Joe, dressed in white moleskin of such weight and thickness that he looked like a polar bear, with his gnarled hands hanging lazily and solidly as if each carried a hundredweight which his gigantic strength made light of,—blue-eyed, grey-whiskered, with deep

blue scars like tattoo marks all over his face,—tramped on serenely, pipe in mouth. Young Joe, with a sprouting bit of whisker, downy as yet, and yellow like a callow fledgling's feathers; blue-eyed, broad-shouldered, lithe and limber, went springily at the old man's side. Young Joe was dressed like a gentleman of that period (it is nearly thirty years since the father and son walked side by side for the last time), and he and the old man made altogether a fine contrast. Old Joe was stolidly genial, as befitted a man who had beaten the world hollow, and now took his ease with dignity. Young Joe had something of an aggressive air, or carried at least a sort of warning in his face—*nemo me impune lacessit*. This warning was perhaps a trifle sulky, as was natural, all things considered. How rich old Joe might be no man knew, but he clung to the dress and habits of his youth—dressed like a working miner on holiday, lived like a miner, looked like a miner, and was proud to talk like one. Young Joe, bred at a distant 'college school,' and returning home only at holiday times, resented these things. His speech was of the finest, his clothes were of the best—the son of a baronet was his chosen chum, he had yearnings towards the world of fashion, and believed that he could shine in that bright sphere, if he had but a chance. Old Joe cared for none of those things, and, except for a certain sturdy self-possession, had no pride.

He would have met the hereditary Autocrat of All the Russias with a sentiment of equality so natural that he would not have dreamed of formulating it even to himself. Young Joe formulated *his* beliefs in the equality of mankind daily, and, with a natural want of logic, resented with great *hauteur* the approach of any of his father's old and less prosperous companions. He himself was 'a man for a' that'—*cela va sans dire*—but 'for a' that and a' that,' the claims of one's social inferiors must be repelled and beaten down. He was the equal of any man above him, but no one below him had a right to a similar claim. This mental attitude is not uncommon.

Young Joe resented his name, and would have preferred Reginald, or Herbert, or Walter or anything rather than Joseph, so easily susceptible of a vulgar abbreviation. He was not without pride in his father, but he resented the old man's clothes, and his house, and his speech. And, most bitterly and shamefacedly of all, he resented the spectacle he was now on his way to witness.

It was summer weather, in days when summer weather meant warmth and sunshine. There was sunshine even here, though the scene lay in the centre of the Black Country. It is pleasant to notice how nature has reasserted herself in that grimy province after all the scars which labour has left upon her. Labour has dug deep into her heart, and has rifled her very entrails and has

set upon her breast such burdens as Enceladus lay under. Yet, wheresoever you see her face, she smiles; wheresoever her busy hands can move she weaves her spells. Tall purple foxgloves lined the road, and the lark shook with the delight of his own song a mile above the smoke wreaths. It was Sunday also, and the smoke wreaths were something thinner and even fewer than they would have been on any other day in the seven. Old Joe had a little of the quiet Sabbath feeling on him. Young Joe, pridefully resenting all things, resented Sunday terribly because of the shame it brought him.

Father and son were on their way to listen to the most popular preacher of the time and neighbourhood. That preacher was a woman. Nay, the murder must out: that woman was Rebecca Bushell, old Joe's wife and young Joe's mother. On the subject of female preachers in general young Joe had incisive opinions, sharpened probably by some personal feeling. That his mother should preach, and be publicly advertised to preach, and that she should speak in public with no disguise of that picturesque and drawling accent which was her birthright, was an affliction which the lad's pride had borne with groaning this many a day. And now, worse than all, here was his mother—in combination with greasy-complexioned professionals, whom he knew, in seedy black and ties of dubious white, and roomy shoes

topped by too-visible stockings of white cotton, also dubious in tone—conducting a camp-meeting, advertised far and wide in flaring posters, and sure to bring, with crowds of the pious, countless railers, to many of whom he himself was known. The reader will understand the term “camp-meeting” in a limited sense. It was a camp-meeting with no encampment, and lasted one day only.

As father and son walked together, there was heard suddenly the bray of a band, drowning the lark's music, and far and wide the sound of the Hallelujah Chorus filled the fields. It was not ignobly played or sung, though band and choir alike needed a little fining here and there. The folk of the Black Country are essentially musical, and here they played and sang with all their heart and soul and lungs. There was a little admixture of strings with the wind instruments, and a tailor led the violins. “Now David,” cried the drummer, as he grasped his sticks, “let thy elbow fly like a lamb's tail!” and David nodded to this encouragement, and led the way at a rattling pace. Whilst the band and choir were in the midst of their fervour, the two late comers took their place at the edge of the vast crowd. There were some five-and-twenty thousand people present, and the gathering could scarcely fail to be impressive. The place of meeting had some advantages and some disadvantages. For one thing, the crowd was sundered by the waters of a canal; but as a

set-off against this, the lock, over which the platform was built, stood some ten or twelve feet above the hollow land in which the multitude had gathered, so that all could at least see the orators of the day. The platform was primitive but secure, and consisted of great beams of timber laid from wall to wall of the lock; and in the centre was another smaller platform on which the more prominent of the promoters of the meeting were gathered. They were a rugged set for the most part, and the presence of one or two massive women added little refinement to this central knot. Mrs. Bushell sat in black silk—square, hard, uncompromising in face and figure—at the little unclothed deal table with red legs, on which were set a water-bottle, a glass, a Bible, and a few scattered hymnbooks. Young Joe, discerning here and there an acquaintance in the crowd, blushed at the figure on the platform and revolted at its presence there. One gentleman, the son of a neighbouring coal-owner, beholding young Joe, waited until he caught his eye, and then, from his coign of vantage near the lock gates, elaborately winked at him. At this and a slight backward motion of the head, indicating the chief personage on the platform, the youngster turned scarlet, but he held his head erect and felt savagely defiant—not least defiant, perhaps, of his mother and the prominence of her place. Old Joe, with his massive hands depending downwards, smoked

his clay calmly at the edge of the crowd by his son's side. These *al-fresco* religious observances had one especial charm for the elder Bushell; they found room for a pipe; and without the soothing influence of his tube of clay, the old man found the best of sermons dull.

Young Joe's resentfulness of humour increased as he stood by his father's side. But he was there to brave the whole thing out, and to show to his friends that he was not ashamed of his father and mother and their ways. But why, in the name of all things abominable, would his father insist on wearing moleskin clothing and on smoking a clay pipe at such a place and time? and why should his mother sit there, the centre of these vulgar orators, gazed at by all these vulgar eyes? He was not ashamed of them, he told himself. Was he not here by his own free will? He grew more and more wrathful and rebellious as he nursed these thoughts.

By-and-by, after the due introductory readings and prayers had been gone through, and when a hymn had been sung with rough and striking grandeur of tone, Mrs. Rebecca Bushell rose squarely up, and gave out her text and preached. I suppose that everybody who reads this will have some notion of what a revival sermon is like, and there is therefore no need for me to set down Mrs. Bushell's utterances. The creed she unfolded was stern and ugly, though modified by some

private tenderness of her own, and young Joe knew well enough that much of the discourse was levelled at himself. The presence of her son gave her speech a passionate earnestness which it would otherwise have missed, and she preached at the crowd through him, and at him through the crowd. This also young Joe resented, and savagely endured. It came to an end at last, and twenty-five thousand pairs of lungs aided the band in giving breath to the Old Hundredth, which rolled its slow, grand stream of sound across the sunny fields, and was heard, soft and sweet with distance, in the Sabbath streets of the town a mile away.

The crowd broke into scattered sections and took its devious way towards a mid-day dinner. The old man and his son passed to the platform.

"Joseph," said Rebecca, descending, "put that pipe away. For shame—on a Sunday, an' at meeting too."

"All right, missis," said Bushell senior. "There's no harm in a pipe." And he smoked on placidly.

His wife, knowing by old experience the uselessness of opposition, resigned the point with a sigh, and walked gravely away with the Reverend Paul Screed.

In these days in which I write the Reverend Paul is dead, and no truth can hurt his feelings

any more. But it is true of him that he preached a vulgar gospel, worshipped a vulgar god, and had vulgar notions upon all things which came within the sphere of an intellect not too well instructed. He was always in remarkable earnest, and was very certain that all his beliefs were accurate and that all beliefs running counter to his own sinful. He was incapable of doing a wilful wrong to anybody. In person he was gaunt and bony, and his general aspect was repellent. Young Joe, resenting most things, resented the Reverend Paul with a vehemence inspired by direct hate. The Reverend Paul, for his part, looked on the young man with a stony severity of holiness which foresaw for him eternal pains and penalties.

Mrs. Bushell, arm-in-arm with the minister, walked homewards, and her husband and her son followed at a little distance. By-and-by came round a corner of the lane, facing this broken quartette, a youngster resplendent in the devices of the latest fashion, switching at the hedges as he walked. The lane was fairly filled with scattered groups of homeward-going worshippers, and all but the new-comer were walking in one direction. He strolled along, a good deal stared at, and pausing suddenly before young Joe, thrust out a gloved hand, and said "Good morning" in a loud and cheery voice. The youngster, a little embarrassed, returned his greeting. The

old man, without pausing, turned his head, and in his broadest drawl bade his son be home in time for dinner.

"Who's that?" said the new-comer. He was one of those people who, without knowing it, are audible under ordinary conditions over a circuit of fifty yards.

"My father," young Joe answered, speaking in tones as loud as the other's, and with an air of injured pride.

"Who's that?" asked old Joe, returning, and joining the young men as they stood before each other.

"Mr. Sydney Cheston," said young Joe; "Sir Sydney Cheston's son. My father, Mr. Cheston."

"How be *you*?" said old Joe, pipe in mouth. He kept his hands in the pockets of his moleskin jacket, and nodded at the baronet's son with perfect naturalness.

"I am very well," returned Mr Cheston. "How be you?"

"I'm as right as a trivet," old Joe answered, unsuspecting of satire. For a moment he had thought the loud "Who's that?" a little impudent, but seeing the young man cheerful and self-possessed, forgot to notice it. Young Joe burned to knock Mr. Sydney Cheston down. "I've heerd Joe talk about you," said the old man com-

fortably. "Come and have a bit o' dinner along of us. Eh?"

"Very sorry," the young buck returned, "I have an engagement."

"All right," said the old man, nodding. "Be in time, Joe. Good mornin', young mister."

"Good morning, governor," said Mr. Cheston with loud cheerfulness. Young Joe raged inwardly. "Queer old bird, the pater," the future baronet made comment, in a moderated voice.

"It occurs to me," young Joe replied, in rapid undertone, "that I am scarcely a fit repository for your opinions."

"My dear fellow," said Mr. Cheston lightly, "everything must have a beginning. You begin now, and we began a hundred years ago. That's all the difference."

"Possibly," said young Joe with great stiffness. His reply was somewhat vague, even to himself; but he felt that he discharged a duty, whilst he relieved the gathered spleen of the whole morning.

"Don't be rusty," Mr. Cheston answered. "Anybody's welcome to tell me that *my* governor's a queer old bird. Most men's governors *are* queer old birds. We shall be queer old birds ourselves some day."

Young Joe, a little mollified and a little in haste to be rid of that sore subject, asked what

had brought his friend into the neighbourhood. The out-of-door worshippers were still straggling by, and Cheston, taking Joe's arm, turned with him and struck across a by-path which led through cornfields, where the bright scarlet of thick-growing poppies lent more beauty than value to the crop.

"I'm staying with old Moulding, at the Hollies," Cheston said; "and as they all went to church this morning, I ventured on a lonely stroll through the region. I'm glad I did it, for I've seen two things which impressed me vastly."

"Imprimis?" asked young Joe, trying to catch some little seeming of gaiety, if only for wounded pride's sake.

"Imprimis," answered Cheston, "the prettiest face I ever set eyes on. A Black Country beauty. A rose springing from an artificial Alp of slag and cinder."

"Oh!" said the other in a meditative way.

"Pleasing spectacle number one," said Cheston gaily, as though addressing an audience, "led to pleasing spectacle number two. Number one, dressed in the most becoming and least conventional fashion, was apparently bound for church or chapel, inasmuch as she bore a hymn-book and looked devotional and demure. Having no fear of the proprieties before my eyes, and having a natural delight in the contemplation of beauty, I

lit up a cigar and strolled after her. By-and-by we came upon an enormous outdoor meeting, where my little beauty met her mother or some other elderly female dragon, and I lost sight of her. But I know where she lives and I am going to have another look at her."

Young Joe, without seeing any clear grounds for apprehension, spoke with some anxiety, though with outer lightness.

"Who is this charming young person?"

"She dwells," said Cheston, simulating a melodramatic tone, "though in what capacity I know not, at the sign of the Saracen's Head, and her divine name is Diana — or Dinah. Yes, it's Dinah. I heard the guardian dragon scold her for being late."

A blush, partly of anger and partly of embarrassment, was on young Joe's face. He forced a laugh.

"Yes, she's a pretty girl;" then hurriedly, to escape further discussion of the topic. "And what was pleasing spectacle number two?"

"Pleasing spectacle number two," said Cheston, with noisy cheerfulness, "was a sort of she-Boanerges in black silk who harangued the multitude. I protest," he went on, laughing heartily, "that she was worth a journey to the North Pole to look at and to listen to. But I dare say you were there and heard her. You were coming back that way. For myself, I walked off

to the Saracen's Head and watched my little divinity in again before I turned to walk to the Hollies."

What with wounded pride, and jealous fear, and his resentful rage at things in general, young Joe was very near to boiling-point.

"You know everybody hereabouts," said Cheston, with obtuse goodhumour and unflagging enjoyment in the sound of his own voice—sweeter music than the spheres could make—"who was the she-Boanerges?"

Young Joe reached boiling-point and bubbled over.

"She was my mother, sir! And in ten minutes you have insulted my father and my mother and have told me how you dogged my—my sweetheart home, and—and— I tell you what it is, Cheston. You cash that I O U I have of yours at your earliest convenience, and don't trouble yourself to know me any more. Good morning."

And off went the hapless young fellow in a great heat, with a face like a peony, and with smarting tears in his eyes. Cheston stood a moment, stunned, as though an invisible avalanche had fallen upon him. Then he raced after his late companion and caught him by the shoulder in the act of mounting the first stile.

"My dear fellow," he said pantingly, "pray forgive me. I was quite ignorant. I wouldn't

have done it for the world. Pray do forgive me. I beg your pardon a hundred thousand times."

Young Joe swung himself out of the other's grasp and mounted the stile. He melted a little notwithstanding. He wanted somebody's sympathy and companionship, and Cheston was evidently very sorry. But how could he turn and show the hot tears which were even then finding their channels on his face? The penitent vaulted the stile after him and pursued him with breathless apology, and at last took him by the shoulders and swung him fairly round. At that, in a sudden gust of added shame for the tears with which his eyes were filled, he gave his rage full swing, and launched a blow at the apologist, and stood waving his arms above him, demanding wildly to know if the prostrate Cheston wanted any more.

"By Jove I do," roared the late penitent, and springing to his feet he threw his hat and coat upon the grass and awaited young Joe's onslaught. For a minute the two stood face to face, in posture of defence. Then Cheston dropped his hands. "It was quite my fault, Bushell," he said, "and I won't fight about it. I don't wonder at your striking me. Let us say no more about it. Shake hands, old man, shake hands."

Thereupon young Joe shamefacedly shook hands, stammered some broken excuses—"temper greatly tried," and so forth—and went his way.

"He's got hatsful of money," meditated the

future baronet, as young Joe walked miserably away. "But ain't he paying for having it, poor beggar?—ain't he just, that's all?"

CHAPTER II.

MR. AND MRS. BUSHELL and the Reverend Paul Screed sat at meat together. A pair of fowls and a leg of mutton, cooked on the previous day to avoid the desecration of the Sabbath by needless labour, decorated the board, whilst hot vegetables made a sort of concession from religious principle to hospitality.

"Shall us wait for Joseph?" the old man asked. Joseph was Joe in non-company hours. The conventional form was a concession to the presence of the Reverend Paul.

"If Joseph can't get home in time for dinner," said Mrs. Bushell, "Joseph must go without."

"Nonsense, missis," said the old man genially. "Nobody go's wi'out grub i' this house as long as there is any. But we'll go on wi'out him if you like."

Grace had already been pronounced by the Reverend Paul, who crumbled his bread in silence during this brief debate, with a demure eye on the leg of mutton. Mrs. Bushell had the head of the the table, and set to work businesslike on the cold fowls. At that moment young Joe entered, still resentful, and somewhat heated by a hurried walk

home. Mrs. Bushell silently carved for him also and set his plate before him. Rather to be doing something to hide the agitation which yet remained with him, than because the food invited him, he took up his knife and fork. The Reverend Paul laid a detaining hand upon his arm, and arose slowly. The three bowed their heads whilst the minister pronounced a second and supplementary "blessing." "For what Mr. Joseph is about to receive may the Lord make him truly thankful." Young Joe accepted this as a new affront, and his food choked him. He pushed his plate a little away, after making an ineffectual attempt at the cold fowl.

"Joseph," said his mother with placid severity, "it is better to serve God than Mammon. I can't break the Sabbath by cooking to satisfy your carnal appetites."

"I don't want you to cook for me, mother," said the young fellow, sorely baited by his own feelings. "The fowl is well enough, but I am not hungry. That is all."

The mother sighed—and the sigh said plainly, "I hold my own opinion." The father set his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"You've been a bit downhearted-like all mornin'. What's the matter, lad? Bain't you well?"

"I am not altogether well, father," young Joe answered.

Mrs. Bushell's severity vanished, and she looked at her son's flushed face with motherly eyes and instant anxiety and pity.

"You're a bit feverish, Joseph," she said; "I can see that. Have a glass o' wine an' lie down."

"I think I will lie down," said young Joe, glad to escape, though conscious of hypocrisy. "I will lie down a little while if you'll excuse me. No, never mind the wine, mother."

"Perhaps," said the Reverend Paul, "it is the working of the powerful word we heard this morning."

Mrs. Bushell shook her head, and sighed again. This second sigh said plainly, "I am a humble vessel."

"Let us hope so, ma'am," said the Reverend Paul, at once recognising and waiving Mrs. Bushell's depreciation of herself.

"The lad's well enough," said old Joe, reaching out his fork and appropriating a slice of cold mutton.

"You're over-careless, Joseph," said Mrs. Bushell, helping the Reverend Paul. "You're over-careless yourself, Joseph. I wish Mr. Screed 'ud say a solemn word to him."

"I will, ma'am," said the Reverend Paul, with his hand upon the beer-jug.

Nothing of this was spoken in young Joe's hearing. He, cooling himself meanwhile with a

cigar in his own room, thought over the events of the morning with self-tormenting accusation. He despised himself for having made allusion to the I O U, and he hated himself for having struck his old school companion and constantly good-humoured friend. And he laid all these things, with whatever other of his faults and misdoings he could think of, at the parental doors; though, even as he did so, some self-accusing thoughts assailed him.

The Reverend Paul in the meantime meditated on the solemn word he had promised to say to young Joe, and as he thought about it, he grew more and more severe in his judgment upon young Joe's private character and spiritual prospects. It was quite in a mood of prophetic indignation, therefore, that he encountered the object of his reflections. The old man had gone upstairs for his afternoon nap—his custom always—and Mrs. Bushell was asleep in the back parlour, when young Joe came a little stealthily downstairs, and, taking his hat from its peg, went towards the door. The Reverend Paul, also moving stealthily, emerged from the front parlour and approached the young man on tiptoe.

"May I ask a word with you?" he said with ghostly solemnity.

"You may," young Joe answered. He had smoked himself into a better humour, but he hated

the reverend gentleman, as I have said already, and his gorge arose at him.

The minister went on tiptoe back into the parlour, and young Joe, like a conspirator, followed stealthily. It was the habit of the household to go about in this wise whilst the elder Bushell took his nap.

"Mister Joseph," said the Reverend Paul, "your mother has requested me to speak a solemn word to you."

"About what?" asked young Joe, with his eyes glittering a little wickedly.

"Your soul," said the Reverend Paul.

"Ah!" said Joe, with a sigh of desperation; "what about it?"

"It is greatly to be feared," said the Reverend Paul, "that you are in a state of impenitence."

"About what?" asked young Joe again. "I'm very penitent for some things, and not at all penitent for others."

"You resist the Spirit," said the minister in a solemn murmur; "you neglect the means of grace; you scoff at the way of safety; you live in open profligacy."

"What?" asked the other. The question was put with startling distinctness, and sounded like a pistol-shot snapping across the subdued grumble of a violoncello.

"I have watched you closely," said the

minister; "you spent an hour yesterday in a tap-room."

"I did nothing of the sort," young Joe declared hotly. "I passed through a taproom on my way to play a game at billiards."

"A profitless and sinful waste of time," said the Reverend Paul.

"There are some things," said young Joe, with a fine-gentleman manner, "which you and I cannot agree upon. I challenge your right to watch me, but every beast acts after his own instinct, and I can't help that. You are my father's guest, Mr. Screed, and I am bound not to quarrel with you. If you take any interest in my spiritual welfare, you will refrain from provoking me to wrath. That is, I believe, the proper phrase. Good afternoon, sir."

The Reverend Paul Screed's wrath was seasoned by a certain self-repression and a certain sense of authority. He told himself, and he believed it, that he did well to be angry. But, in spite of the fact that he was, according to his lights, a good man, he had a strain of meanness in him. Anger, says the old poet, is a brief madness. It is also a self-revelation, searching as lightning.

Young Joe was on his way to the door, hat in hand. The minister, with one hand on the wall and the other grasping the edge of the door, barred his progress.

"I am not to be debarred, Mister Joseph,"

he said, very picked and precise in every syllable, as men only educated late in life are apt to be, —“I am not to be debarred, Mr. Joseph, from doing my duty by any pretended contempt you may assume. It is my business to warn you, and I do it without fear. If my warnings are disregarded by you, I shall carry them elsewhere. I have already told you that I have watched you closely. I witnessed your parting last night from that unhappy girl whom you are endeavouring to entrap.”

“Eh?” said young Joe, an octave higher than his common speech, and very softly.

“I spoke to her,” said the Reverend Paul, “and admonished her. And I shall make it my business now, for her soul’s safety and yours, to tell your parents and hers what I know about this matter.”

“You will, will you?” said the other in the same soft key.

“I can tell already,” said the Reverend Paul, “that it will be useless to appeal to any honourable instinct in you. And I have seen enough of the girl whom you have endeavoured to make the victim of your arts and wiles, to know that only constant watching could ensure her safety.”

At that instant three people were tremendously surprised. And I cannot tell who was the most profoundly amazed amongst them. I record the fact. Young Joe struck the Reverend Paul

and knocked him headlong into the arms of Bushell senior, at the act of entering the room. Father and son regarded each other across the semi-prostrate figure of the minister with blank amazement, for young Joe was as wildly astonished at his own deed as even the Reverend Paul himself could be. Yet, having done the deed, he must abide by it.

"Why, what's all this?" demanded the old man sternly.

"This fellow," said young Joe, scornfully indicating the minister, who held a white handkerchief to his mouth, "has the insolence to tell me that he has been watching me this long time past. He says he saw me kiss a pretty girl last night, and that he's going to tell her mother and my mother, and have us looked after and taken care of. And he has the audacity to tell me that nothing but close watching can save my—my sweetheart's virtue."

O disingenuous and cowardly young Joe! It was not too late even then, and one honest word might have saved you, but you would not speak it.

"An' becos a minister o' God's word, as is a old man likewise, speaks a honest word o' warnin' to you, you go an' knock him down! An' you do it in your father's house, of a Sunday!"

"He insulted a lady," said young Joe, "for whom I have a great respect and regard. I never meant to strike him. I tried to leave the room,

and he stood in the doorway, and wouldn't let me pass. Suppose a man had attacked my mother's reputation before you married her, wouldn't you have knocked him down?"

Old Joe had been a little too handy at knocking people down in his own youth, on slighter provocation, to feel that he had any great right to be severe about this matter. Yet he felt keenly that it must in some way be atoned for. He was angry, but he was puzzled, and, as his readiest refuge from bewilderment, he looked angrier than he was. As for young Joe, he began to feel that he was dangerous and incendiary. He had knocked down two men in one day, and he was now bitterly ashamed of the achievement. One of the men was his closest friend, and the other was elderly and was laid under professional obligations not to fight. But the more ashamed he grew, the more shameful his last misdeed seemed likely to appear in the eyes of others, and the more necessary it became to shroud himself in a sort of cloak of tacit scorn of everybody, and be sulky in as dignified a way as came easily.

The rustle of a silk dress was heard, and Mrs. Bushell stood in the doorway, by her husband's side. At the bare sight of his mother young Joe recognised the hopelessness of any defence, and threw himself upon the sofa.

"What's the matter?" asked Mrs. Bushell.

"Your son," said the Reverend Paul Screed,

removing the handkerchief, "has answered the solemn word of warning you desired me to address to him by blows."

"Not blows," said the culprit from the sofa, hardening himself, "a blow."

"I do not know," said the minister, "whether I received one blow or more. I am still a little shaken by his violence."

"Joseph," said Mrs. Bushell, advancing, "leave this house, and never come back to it again."

"Very well," said the young man, rising. Even at that moment the mother's heart yearned over him, but she must acquit herself of duty first and be tender afterwards. She knew her husband would interfere and she never dreamed that her only child would leave her, even though she ordered him away.

"Rot an' nonsense!" said the old man angrily. "If it's anybody's business to order my son out o' my house, it's mine. Fair play's a jewel. Joe's done wrong, but we do' know" — (meaning "don't know") — "the rights o' this business yet. Now, parson, it's your turn. Say thy say."

Mr. Sereed answered nothing, and Mrs. Bushell, still confident in her husband's interference, turned again upon her son.

"Leave the house, Joseph."

"Very well," said young Joe again, and passing from the room went upstairs, and began to pack his belongings together. Meanwhile the mi-

nister told his story, and from his own point of view told it fairly.

"Mr. Banks," said Mrs. Bushell, "ain't a godly person, but I've known Dinah ever since her was a baby, an' her's as good a gell as ever lived, I believe. I've seen as Joe an' her was fond of each other, an' I always thought somethin' 'ud come of it."

"Cuss it all, passon," said old Joe in great heat, "why shouldn't the lad kiss his sweetheart, an' why should yo' goo and black her character to him?"

"I did my duty," said Mrs. Screed with dignity.

"Forgiveness is a Christian duty," said Mrs. Bushell, alarmed by the sounds which came from above, where young Joe was vigorously cording a box. "I needn't tell *you* that, sir. But Joseph shall beg your pardon on his bended knees, or out of this house he goes."

"I am willing to accept his apology," said the Reverend Paul with a real effort towards charity, which cost him dear.

Mrs. Bushell mounted the stairs and entered her son's bedroom. He was hastily searching the pockets of an old light overcoat, and when his mother entered he threw the garment upon the bed, where it lay with all its pockets turned inside out. Whatever he searched for was not found, for he turned, and, disregarding his mother's pre-

sence, took a hasty look through a number of documents—old letters, scraps of newspapers and what not—in an open drawer, and then, as if putting off the search to a more convenient moment, tumbled the papers loosely together into a portmanteau which he strapped and locked. His mother watched him with a cold demeanour which belied the longing of her heart.

“Joseph!” she said harshly, yearning over him.

“Yes, mother,” said he, looking up for a minute.

“Come downstairs an’ beg Mr. Screed’s pardon, or out o’ this house you go.’

“Beg his pardon for insulting me!” said young Joe bitterly. “No thank you, mother. As for leaving the house, I’ve been ready and willing to do that this many a day. It’s been none too happy a home for me, with its parsons and prayer-meetings.”

“Where do you think you’re going?” asked Mrs. Bushell severely, wounded by this last allusion. “A wise son maketh a glad father, but he that is foolish despiseth his mother. He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul, but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding. You come down and beg Mr. Screed’s pardon, or out o’ this house you go.”

“Very well, mother,” said young Joe; and Mrs. Bushell, her mission having failed, went downstairs again.

"Joseph," she said, addressing her husband, "I can do nothin' with him. Will you speak to him?"

The old man called his son from the foot of the stairs, and Joe came down with a box on his shoulder and a portmanteau in his hand. He set them down outside the parlour door, and stood there sulkily.

"I've heerd this thing through o' one side," said old Joe, striving to deal honestly with the case. "What ha' you got to say?"

"I have said all that I have to say," young Joe answered. "He was insolent, and I lost my temper. I told him once that he was my father's guest, and that I had no right to quarrel with him. I bade him good afternoon, but he stopped me, and was more insolent than ever."

"Now, look here, Joseph," said the old man: "you ask Mr. Screed's pardon, and tak' them things upstairs again, and be a good lad, and let's hear no more about it."

"I wouldn't forgive Mr. Screed," said young Joe, feeling himself to be a very plucky martyr now, "if he asked my pardon fifty times, and that I should apologise to him is out of the question."

"Then leave the house," said Mrs. Bushell, still belying herself and thinking it righteous to do so.

"I can send for these, I suppose?" said young Joe, indicating the chest and the portmanteau.

"Good-bye, father. Good-bye, mother. When next you feel inclined to be insolent, sir, remember the deserved chastisement you once met with at my hands."

With that final defiance, young Joe was gone. He was very miserable, and very much ashamed; but there was not one of the three who remained behind who did not confess that he had at least a shadow of right on his side. Indeed, the whole of this poor quarrel was conducted by people who were ashamed of their part in it. The Reverend Paul felt that he had gone further with the lad than duty impelled him. The mother repented of her cruel ultimatum, and cried to think she had not used softer means. The father was angry with himself for having allowed young Joe to go. The lad himself, as we have seen already, was heartily ashamed. Of course each member of the quartette would have fought the quarrel through again, rather than admit just then a shade of wrong on his or her own side.

Young Joe could scarcely analyse his sensations at that time. He was very fond of his father and very proud of him, in spite of an education which had done much to weaken all family ties. For his mother he had an affection much less keen. There had never been any sympathy between them, so far as young Joe knew; and although his negative knowledge was necessarily incomplete, it was a barrier more than sufficient.

against love's progress. I regret that we shall see but little of that hard old Calvinist, for to one who knew her well she was a woman well worth knowing. She had more affection in her than anybody gave her credit for, and she loved her only child with so passionate a tenderness that she prayed every night and morning that she might not make an "idol" of him. In this wise she succeeded in disguising her love so perfectly that young Joe had grown up in the belief that his very presence was distasteful to her.

So, with a so sore heart and with some burdens of conscience, the young fellow dawdled away from the house in which he was born, resolved never to return to it. The future looked blank enough, for he had no business or profession, and had discovered in himself no special aptitudes which were likely to be profitable to him. He had ten pounds in his pocket, and might be able, perhaps, on his personal possessions of jewelry and what not, to realise fifty. The prospect was altogether dreary, and in spite of his resolve not to return, he was conscious of a very definite longing that his father would run after him and take forcible possession of him by ear or shoulder. He would willingly have gone back—even ignominiously — so that the ignominy had not seemed voluntary. But nobody ran after him; no restraining voice called him; and young Joe went his way

to shame and sorrow, as many a thousand worse and better men have gone before him; for the want of one wise courage in himself, or, failing that, one word of friendly resolution from outside him.

There was nothing to invite or encourage him in the blank Sabbath street, where one cur lay in the sunshine snapping at the flies. Young Joe had upon him an impulse to kick the cur, but restrained himself, and went miserably and moodily along. It was counted highly improper and even immoral to smoke in the streets on Sunday in that quarter of the world; but Joe, feeling that he was leaving the town and could afford to despise its edict, lit a cigar and hardened himself. He chose a way which led him across certain mournful meadows, where the grass was poisoned by the exhalations of a chemical factory near at hand, and rambled on through frowsy verdure until he reached a canal. The artificial hills rose high on each side of the cutting, and on one side ran clean into the water, wooded to the very edge. On the other, the towing-path was green except for one little streak. The water was without motion, or the place might have passed for an unusually favourable scrap of English river scenery. The artificial bluffs were bold and precipitous, and they had the merit of hiding the defaced country which lay beyond them. Up and down the towing-path young Joe wandered with the air

of a man who has appointed a rendezvous. He waited for perhaps an hour, when round the corner of the farthest bluff came a figure in fluttering white muslin and a straw hat. His back was turned, and the new-comer, with innocent mirthful mischief in her face, ran tiptoe along the sward, and clapped both hands across his eyes.

"Guess who it is," said the new-comer blithely.

Young Joe returned no answer. The expression in the girl's face changed. She moved her hands, and saw—what she had only felt before—that they were wet with tears. She threw one arm around his neck, and, seeking his left hand with hers, asked with tender solicitude,

"What is it, Joe, dear? What's the matter?"

Young Joe, facing about, kissed her, and took both her hands in his. The tears still glistened on the lashes over his gloomy eyes, and the girl regarded him with a look of fear and anxiety.

"I have bad news for you, Dinah," said young Joe at last. "I am turned out of house and home and I shall have to go away somewhere and face the world."

"Turned out of house and home?" questioned Dinah, with brown frightened eyes wide open.

"Turned out of house and home," young Joe repeated sombrely. "But don't be afraid, Dinah. I shall be able to take care of myself and you. I shall cast about for something to do,

and I'll work my fingers to the bone rather than see you want anything."

"Turned away from home?" Dinah again asked. "Who turned you away?"

Joe related the incidents of the afternoon, with some little natural bias.

"And you see, dear, there's nothing for it but to go away and"—with a bitter little laugh—"and seek my fortune."

"But, Joe," said Dinah, "you hadn't ought to have hit him, and him a middle-aged man. Wouldn't it be better, darling, to go back and say as you was sorry?"

"Good heaven, Dinah!" said young Joe, "don't say *hadn't ought*. How can I go back and say I'm sorry? I'm not sorry; and even if I were, I couldn't go back and say so, to have them think I was afraid to face the world."

Dinah stood grave and thoughtful for a minute, and then said,

"I suppose I mustn't tell father as we're a-going?"

"My darling," said young Joe, "you mustn't think of coming with me. Not at first, you know. I must go away and get something to do, and make a home for you. We can't run away like two babes in the wood, in that fashion. It won't be long, Dinah. Don't cry, my darling, don't cry. We shan't be long apart. I'll take care of that."

"I don't see any use," said Dinah, sitting disconsolately on the side of the spoil-bank and wiping her eyes with her little muslin apron—"I don't see any use in being married if a wife can't go along with her husband when he's turned out of house an' home, and hasn't got anywhere to go to. O Joe, you can't leave me behind—you can't be so cruel. No, Joe, no, you couldn't have the heart to leave me."

Joe sat down beside her on the grass-grown bank and soothed her, feeling himself very guilty all the while. Dinah refused to be comforted, and yet found his proffered comfort pleasant. But by-and-by a certain coquettish little petulance took the place of grief, and young Joe knew that he had half won his cause, which he admitted was a poor one to win.

"Don't tell me, Joe," said pretty Dinah, "as your folks are going to drive you away for always—I know better. If you take 'em at their word, and stay away a week, they'll be glad to have you back again."

Young Joe recognised the truth of this observation, but it played such havoc with the heroics of the case that he resented it and pooh-poohed it with a sombre gloom.

"It isn't very kind of you, Dinah," said Joe, glad to appear as the injured person of the two "to make light of such a serious matter. And I would not lower myself in my own esteem by

begging myself back again for anything the world could give me. I couldn't do it, darling, even for your sake. No, I'll work for you and struggle for you, but I won't do a mean thing even for *you*."

He said "even for you" so tenderly, and there was such an obvious self-accusation in him when he said it, that the girl threw her arms about his neck and kissed him.

"I know you're noble an' 'igh spirited, my dear," she said, "and I shall never say a word to ask you to be nothing else for me. No, not a word, Joe. And I've been a very thankless girl, Joe, to make believe as it was my trouble, when it was yours all the time. Why, dear me! it's no great matter for me to go on livin' at home with my father an' mother, till you can afford to send for me, is it, Joe? No, darlin', I shan't fret no more about myself."

He read the devotion and the affection in her heart, and had a dim notion that he could not be altogether a bad fellow, since she gave him such unstinted love. It stirred a vague comfort in him and strengthened him to approve of himself. He bullied his conscience into quiet, therefore, and began to take quite a high tone with it.

"It's perhaps a good thing, after all," he said. "A man ought not to be dependent upon anybody. He ought to be able to take care of himself. And I shall go into the world and fight

for you, Dinah, and that will help me. And when I have made a place for you——” He smiled in appreciation of the work already done—in fancy.

“Don’t mind about its being a very fine place at first, dear,” said Dinah, nestling to him and admiring him with all her heart—his courage, his misfortune, his love.

“Not too fine a place at first,” said Joe, “but later on a palace of a place.”

He said it lightly, and she laughed at the badinage, but in a moment they were grave again. It was a bitter business, after all. When the time for parting came, Joe strained her to his breast, and she hung about him sobbing.

“Go,” she said, struggling to be brave. “Go, an’ God bless you, my own dear, dear, ever dearest Joe.”

At this courageous sorrow young Joe melted.

“Yes,” he said, “I *will* go. I’ll go home and beg Screed’s pardon, and I’ll—I’ll tell my father that we’re married, Dinah, and if he likes to cut up rough about it he can, but I can at least feel then that I’ve acted like a man, and not like a coward. And if he likes to send me away then, I can work with a clear conscience, and I shall know that I’ve done my duty.”

Now, women have always been puzzles to me, and I understand very little of them, but I have noticed in them one consistent peculiarity.

If you once succeed in awaking in a woman that sense of protecting strength and tenderness which the most helpless of women are capable of feeling over even the most helpful of men, she will protect you, at the cost of serious wounds, from the merest scratch of any little thorn. Dinah would have none of this wholesome and honest sacrifice for her sake.

"No," she said, fairly yearning over him and worshipping him for this bare promise of bare justice. "Don't vex him with any talk about me yet, my dear. Why, you know, darling," she went on, strangling her own hopes with the bowstring her sultan had sent her a month before, "that if you hadn't known as it 'ud vex him, you'd ha' told him of it long ago. And now you want to tell him when he's vexed a'ready."

"I don't care," said Joe, feeling heroic. "He can't do anything worse than he has done. I'll do the right thing."

But Dinah clung to him.

"No," she said. "You shan't ruin yourself for me, Joe." And she clung to her point with such vehemence that Joe yielded, and had all the satisfaction of seeming heroic without incurring any danger—a joy which I have myself experienced.

They kissed and embraced again, and Joe

wiped her eyes, and promised brokenly to write often.

"You're not a-going far away, my darlin', are you?" said Dinah, trying to be brave again.

"No, dear, no," said he in answer; "not far."

"And, Joe, darlin'," she said, after a tearful pause, relieved by many sad kisses, "will you let me keep my marriage lines?"

She whispered the question at his ear, and he bent over tenderly the while.

"Yes, yes, my dear," he answered; "I meant to bring them to you this afternoon, but I was in such a hurry. They are packed up in my port-manteau, but I will send them to you."

"You don't mind my askin' for 'em, do you, Joe."

"I was wrong all through," he said; "we ought to have been married openly. But I shall do you justice, Dinah. You know that, don't you?"

And so, with protestations, and caresses, and hopes, and with some repentances on his side, they parted. Joe climbed the bank again, and waved adieu from the top. She answered with a motion of the hand, and he was gone.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. BUSHELL did what she could to atone to the minister for the terrible insult which had been put upon him by her son. Old Joe sat awhile and smoked in silence, and, being greatly exercised by the whole business, drank rather more whisky and water than was good for him. Finally a streak of light appeared, and he went, a little flushed, towards it. It led him for a while by the road young Joe had taken an hour or two before, but he stopped short of the mangy meadow and sounded a heavy rattat at the door of a smart-looking house, which stood a little back from the lane. A neat servant-maid responded to this summons.

"Is Brother George in?" asked the old man.

"Yes, sir," said the damsel, and led the way into a gaudily furnished parlour, where in black broadcloth sat an intensely respectable man in an armchair by the fireplace.

"Joe-ziph," said the intensely respectable man, dividing the name into two balanced syllables, "how are you?"

"George," said old Joe, seating himself, "I'm in a bit o' trouble."

"You don't say so, Joe-ziph," said the respectable man, with a wooden want of interest.

"Yis," said old Joe, rubbing his grey hair with an enormous palm. "I'm in a peck o' trouble. My Rebecca has been an' ordered my Joe out o' my house, an' he's took her at a word, an' he's gone."

"Dear me," said Brother George, as woodenly as before.

"Yes," said old Joe again, "he's took her at a word, an' he's gone."

"What did her order him off for?" asked Brother George.

Old Joe told the story, with rough-hewn brevity, and his brother nodded now and then to signify attention. In point of fact, it interested him more than it seemed to do. He was pretty nearly as wooden as he looked, but he had a very remarkable eye for the main chance. He saw money with an eye at once telescopic and microscopic, and he scented it, or seemed to scent it, as a sleuth-hound scents his game. Joe Bushell had made his money by a remarkably profitable patent, was worth a quarter of a million if a penny, and lived on less than a twentieth part of his income. George had borrowed from his brother to start life as a charter-master, had worked hard and lived hard, and screwed down all under him to the uttermost farthing, and, having made his money chiefly by hard-fistedness, was hated by his workpeople, and knew it, and rather rejoiced in it than otherwise, as being in some sense a tribute to his business capacity. He was a

mean and grudging creature, with no instinct of active dishonesty. He had a dull, slow, wooden dislike of young Joe, because young Joe would one day inherit old Joe's fortune. Not that George had ever had a hope of it himself, but he grudged wealth to anybody, and could have nursed a spite against the very walls of a bank's strong-room for holding so much money. And now for the first time in his life dawned upon him some dim fancy, scarcely a hope, that he might handle Brother Joseph's money as his own some day. It was that dim fancy which made old Joe's story interesting to him.

"Now," said the father, when his narrative was finished, "what I want thee to do, George, is just this. Thee go an' find Joe, an' fetch him hum. Tek' no sort o' denial. He can stop wi' thee a day or two, an' then, when it's blowed over wi' Rebecca, he can come back to me. Dost see?"

"Ah," said Brother George, "I see." And he saw more than he confessed to seeing. He intended no wrong to anybody, but was it likely that young Joe would listen to his solicitations? He thought not. And if that misguided young man declined to listen, might not his absence become a source of profit to his uncle? "Where is he?" the uncle asked, after giving these reflections time to form.

"Well, thee seest," said old Joe, rubbing

his head perplexedly, "we do' rightly know wheer he is. But he's bound to send for his luggage."

"Ah," said Brother George again, "*I* see."

"I think," old Joe resumed, "as he's likely to send for it to-night. Our Joe's allays in a bit of hurry, an' does everythin' hot-foot."

"Then," said George, "I'd better come up to your place, eh?"

"Just what I wanted," answered old Joe; and the two set out together. "Not a word to the missis, mind." George nodded in reply, turning over in that stiff-jointed mind of his the question—Shall I break or keep *that* promise? Which is likelier to pay? He would not have robbed young Joe—he would not have robbed anybody. Theft was 'agen the law.' But although any plain and straightforward method of transferring a neighbour's coin to his pouch was a thing to be reprehended, the construction of any crooked scheme for that purpose was praiseworthy, and the carriage of the same to triumphant effect was a thing to be proud of. In short, Brother George was a diplomatist, and had some personal advantages in the diplomatic way—singular as that statement may appear. He could lie, for instance, with a stolidity which defied scrutiny. Practice had done much for him, but the first great gift was Nature's. He was "inscrutable" enough to have realised a Tory journalist's idea of a prime minister. His

respectable countenance, clean-shaven but for its respectable tufts of grey whisker, was scarcely more mobile than a mask. Since he never lied apart from strict necessity, he was commonly regarded as a veracious man. He is not the scoundrel of this story—which, indeed, scarcely aspires to the portraiture of a real rascal—and nobody who knew him thought of him as being anything but a very respectable self-made man, who did unusual credit to his original station in life. The remarkable woodenness of his manner, and a certain solemn drawl he had, were mainly responsible for the family belief in his wisdom. He was the final authority on family affairs.

The Reverend Paul had left the house when the brothers reached it. Mrs. Bushell was sitting in the kitchen with a big Bible before her, earnestly and believingly struggling after comfort in the utterances of Habakkuk. There are people who find Christian philosophies in Solomon's Song and suck satisfaction out of Ecclesiastes; and Mrs. Bushell was of them. But at this sorrowful hour, a philippic against the Chaldeans, "that bitter and hasty nation," had little power to soothe.

"Brother George," she said, as that respectable person entered, "has Joseph been a-asking your advice?"

"Rebecker," Brother George replied with weighty solemnity, "far be it from me to deny

anythin' as is true. That's what Joe-ziph come to see me for, as far as I can see."

"Why," read Mrs. Bushell with her finger tracking the denouncing lines in the great Bible, "why dost thou show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me; and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked and judgment doth never go forth; for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth."

"Well, well, Rebecker," said Brother George with a propitiatory accent, "boys will be boys, you know, an' allays was."

"They wouldn't *be* boys if they wasn't," said old Joe, with a touch of the local humour.

"Joseph!" said Mrs. Bushell warningly.

"Becky, my gell!" said old Joe, leaning above her chair and laying a heavy hand upon her shoulder.

She felt the appeal thus conveyed, for she was by nature a woman of much tenderness. But she only straightened herself, and laid her finger once more upon the warning text.

"There's my guide, Joseph," she made answer, when she could trust her voice, for she was sore disturbed, and her "worldly longings," as she called them, moved strongly in her heart.

Old Joe moved away from the back of her chair, and Brother George sat down with an air

of wisdom on him, and looked as one who is prepared to proffer counsel. There was silence for a time; then Mrs. Bushell turned her head away and asked,

"What do you advise, Brother George?"

"Well," said Brother George, venting an elaborate and prolonged wink upon old Joe, "I should advise as nothing should be done, not to say precipitate."

"Yes," said old Joe, nodding at his brother, "give him a day or two, an' he'll come round."

"Joseph," said Mrs. Bushell, with unfortunate solemnity, "if you look for any healin' of this breach apart from his repentance, you will wait in vain. If you mean as I shall come round, you are mistaken. In this case, Joseph, there is duty to be done, an' I've spoke my last word a'ready."

Joe shook his head at Brother George mournfully, and George shook his head in answer. Matters were growing rather bright for Brother George, and if the brightness were only nebulous as yet, it might reveal things pleasant to look at by-and-by. Notwithstanding this cheerful inward knowledge, however, George looked upon his brother with a solemn countenance. He would fain have appealed seriously to his sister-in-law's forbearance, and so have drawn from her a more emphatic and forcible denial of her own desires, but he was afraid of that experiment.

"Becky," said old Joe, being perhaps a little more accessible to emotion at that moment than he commonly was, "the lad was hard put on. The parson go's an' says things to him about his sweetheart, an' it stands to r'ason as Joe got humped at it. He axed me, Becky, afore you come into the room, what I'd ha' done if any mon had said things to me about yo' afore we got married. It wouldn't ha' made much differ to me, I think," said old Joe, driving one great hand into the palm of the other, "who it was as said it. I'd ha' floored him, if he'd ha' killed me the next minute."

Brother George nodded gloomily in assent to this, for it seemed to him an unanswerable argument in young Joe's favour. But Mrs. Bushell held firm.

"I've spoke my last word, Joseph. He struck a minister o' God's word, in his own father's house, of a Sunday; an' if that ain't worth sayin' 'I'm sorry for,' I've got no more to say."

Brother George nodded again in acquiescence, for this view of the case also seemed unanswerable.

"Gi'e the lad time," urged old Joe.

"Let him tak' his own time, Joseph," said the mother staunchly. "When he's tired o' the husks o' the Prodigal, he'll come back again. But I fear he'll sup sorrow by spoonfuls i' the way."

She left the room, and old Joe, with a troubled face, set tobacco and a glass of whisky before

his brother. The pair sat in gloomy silence for a while, when a knock came to the door. Old Joe answered this summons.

"Who's theer?" he asked.

"Well," said a voice from the dark outside, "as fur as my apinium go's, it's a young feller o' the name o' Bowker."

"Come in, William," said old Joe in a shaky voice. "What be you come for?"

"Why, your son's at the Dudley Arms," said Mr. Bowker, entering the kitchen, "an' he's sent me up here t' ax for his box. He's a-goo'in' in to Brummagem to-night, he says, an' on to London i' the mornin'."

"Goo an' say a word to him, George," said the father. "Don't let the lad go further 'n Brummagem. Mak' him send word to you wheer he is, when he gets theer, an' we'll tek care on him. But, George, don't go to let him know as I ain't angry wi' him. Mind that. Do it all as if it was comin' from yourself like. D'ye see?"

"I see," said Brother George. Could anything have been designed to play better into the hands of a respectable man who desired to secure an advantage and was afraid of a crime? He would not in this case have even the shadow of a lie upon his conscience. All that was to be done was to tell the truth, and obey instructions—in breaking them. Mrs. Bushell, without an apology, was implacable, and her husband wished to have

it supposed that he also was very angry. George knew very well that his nephew would tender no apology just then, and began to look complacently on the promise of the future.

Young Joe sat moody and alone in the smoke-room of the Dudley Arms, awaiting the return of his emissary, when Uncle George entered, and with a solemn aspect took a seat before him.

"This is a bad job, Joe-ziph," said he, shaking his head. "I've heerd all about it from your mother and father. I don't say as you was in the wrong, not to say altogether, but you know as it was a dreadful thing to do — a dreadful thing. But look thee here, my lad," he continued, with a wooden assumption of geniality which went, howsoever unreal it might be, clean to the lad's sore heart, "blood's thicker than water, an' when all's said an' done you're my nevew and I'm your uncle. Now, what d'ye mean to do? They'm hard on you at home, fearful hard."

"I shall go out and face the world," said young Joe. "I'm not afraid!"

"Of course you ain't, a fine-built young fellow like you! It ain't likely as you would be. But look here, my lad—you can't face the world on nothing. Can you, now?"

"I have something to begin with," said Joe in answer. "I am not altogether without money. And then, I have a little owing to me."

"Ah, dear me. Well. I can see as you're just as hot-foot as your father and mother! But come now, wheer do you think o' goin' to!"

"I'd go to America," said young Joe, "if I only had the chance."

"Merriky?" echoed Uncle George. "It's a long way there."

"The longer the better," said Joe bitterly.

"No, no, Joseph," said Uncle George. "Don't say that. But if you're bent on it, why, I——. No, no, Joseph, don't think on it."

"Yes," said Joe, "I'll do it. I'll do it if I work my passage out. There's room for a man to move in, in America."

"Don't you talk nonsense," said Uncle George.

"By Jove!" quoth young Joe, rising, and feeling already the glow of a successful explorer, "I'll show you whether or not I'm talking nonsense. I tell you, sir, I'll do it, and I will."

"Pooh!" said Uncle George; "you ain't going to work your passage out. Not while you've got a uncle as can put his hand in his pocket to help you. No, no, Joseph."

"You're very kind, uncle," said Joe, "but I can't accept any help from you." And he wondered "why did I never see what a good fellow Uncle George is until now?"

"Wait here a bit," said the benevolent uncle, and with that arose, and left the room with stagey stealth. When he returned, he bore with him a

sheet of letter-paper and an inkstand. He sat down in silence, and wrote in a slow and laboured manner. Then he produced a pocket-book, from which, after an intricate search, he drew a crumpled receipt-stamp. Gazing hard at Joe, he moistened this with his tongue, affixed it to the paper, and then, squaring his elbows, he set his head down sideways to the table, and laboriously signed the document. Joe watched him, not knowing what all this might mean, until the sheet, carefully dried before the fire, was placed in his own hands. He read it with a swift moistening of the eyes, less at the gift than at the kindness which dictated it.

"Thank you, uncle," said young Joe. "God bless you for your goodness. You are the only friend I have."

"If they knowed," said his only friend truthfully, "as I'd helped you i' this way, they'd never forgive me. But wherever you goo, Joseph, remember as you've got a friend in me. Allays write to me, my lad; allays write to me."

Therewith the benevolent uncle squeezed his nephew's hand and left him. Young Joe sat with his elbows on the table, and looked with new-born affection and gratitude after him. Why had he never understood Uncle George until now?

"A dear good fellow!" he said aloud in his enthusiasm; "a most kindly, generous fellow!"

And with tears of gratitude hot in his eyes,

he folded up his uncle's cheque for a hundred pounds.

CHAPTER IV.

YOUNG JOE, his heart still warmed by his uncle's generosity, sat at the side of the bed in his room at the Dudley Arms that Sunday night, and surveyed the situation. Starting in this well-provided way, it did not seem easy to fail in the world. Practically, as everybody knows there is an end to the productive powers of a hundred pounds, but, for all that, a hundred pounds is a good round sum for a start in the world, and young Joe saw already in fancy his fortune made.

"And I'll make poor little Dinah happy, anyhow," he thought. She haunted him, and her memory filled him with a keen and poignant remorse. "The poor child," he said to himself, "must have her marriage lines." With that he unstrapped his portmanteau, tumbled out its disorderly papers on the carpet, and set to work to search for the certificate of the marriage between Joseph Bushell, bachelor, and Dinah Banks, spinster. First, he made a hasty and confident grope amongst the papers; next, with a little shade of perplexity on his face, he took a more careful search; and finally, having separately examined every scrap, turned out his pockets, unlocked his

chest and searched through its contents, and still met with no success, he sat down on the lid of the box in the midst of his tumbled belongings and clawed his hair with vexation.

"Confound it all!" said Joe. "The thing's somewhere here, I'm sure. I must look for it by daylight." With this promise by way of consolation for almost certain loss he undressed and got into bed. He had but a poor night of it, for Dinah's appealing face was always before him, and he felt alternately base and heroic as he thought of his encounter with the minister. The candle burned down and went out, with the result particularised in the Honourable Mr. Sucklethumbkin's account of a public execution. Then the moonlight sent into the room a beam which travelled very, very slowly across the carpet, and rose very slowly up the fireplace, and when Joe had tossed about for long ages, reached the mirror, and crept along the wall, and slid slowly towards the window, as its brightness faded and died. Then the swallows who built beneath the roof-pipes began to chirrup, and the window glimmered grey. Joe pulled up the blind and lighted a cigar, and looked a last look on the familiar High Street: a last conscious look, at least, for always when Memory brought her budget of pictures to him thereafter, she brought that view, with the grey desolate dawnlight broadening on the closed shutters of the shops, and he heard distinctly, many

a time, by Memory's magic, the stately step of the peeler — "the blue-robed guardian of the city streets," as a minor poet called him once upon a time—patrolling the silent high-way.

I—the present writer — have found it necessary, for one reason or another, to face the world anew so often, and under such varying circumstances, that I have almost worn out the sensations attendant on the process. But striving, as a faithful chronicler should strive, to project myself into young Joe's personality, I succeed chiefly in calling to mind my first impressions of that melancholy yet inspiriting business. I recall the heartache and the sense of freedom — the regrets for past folly and the promises of amendment so devoutly sworn—the dear regard for parted friends, the hope to meet again, the determination to return triumphant.

All these held sway in the young fellow's heart. But for Uncle George's news of the attitude of father and mother, he could willingly have gone home again to say good-bye, not without hope of no good-bye being said. Shame pulled him both ways, now homewards, now abroad. After all, going back was out of the question. He packed carefully, purposing to go once more through the papers, but when he came to them he said, without being quite sure of the motive which moved him, "I'll look into them on the way," and so thrust them anew into his portman-

teau, and waited drearily for some sign of life in the hotel.

At the first sound of opening doors he rang his bell, and demanded of Boots, who came unkempt and sleepy, the time-table for London. The railway had not reached the outlying Black Country towns at this time, but coaches ran through most of them to the great New Street station in Birmingham, a marvel of art, whose vast glass roof was in those days, as I can just remember, an object of unfading wonder to the populace. The coach would start in time to catch the mid-day train, and there were four hours to wait. He went down-stairs and sat alone in the dismal coffee-room, and being presently broken in upon by a damsel in curl-papers, asked for breakfast, and in an hour's time attacked with languid appetite a cindery dish of eggs and bacon, and investigated a funereal-looking Britannia metal urn containing a dark-coloured semi-liquid tepid concoction announced by the curl-papered damsel as coffee. After this he called dejectedly for his bill, ordered Boots to send on his luggage by the coach in time for the up-train, and set out to walk. His spirits rose as he went along the road. Town seems in danger of meeting town to-day, and some now alive may live to see a vaster London join its scattered parts in the middle of England, forming one solid and prodigious city. But there were fair spaces of field and park about

the central town when Joe walked towards it, and here and there a rabbit frolicked across his path, and once he stood still to watch a weasel shoot across the road from hedge to hedge, where a grey rabbit had run a second before. "The mellow ousel fluted in the elm," colts pushed their inquiring heads over the gates which held them from the road, the sun shone clear, the wind blew warm. Joe meant no wrong to any human creature. Why should trouble weigh upon him? He pegged on, with snatches of song on his mind, and high resolve in his heart. There was gold in California. Jim Brooks, the High Street tailor's son, had found a nugget weighing two hundred ounces. Gold-digging was the readiest way to wealth the world had seen, and many a man had prospered at it — Why not he? The great Henry Russell's song were in vogue, and young Joe sang jollily back to the lark and throstle:—

Pull away, cheerily,
Not slow or wearily,
Shifting the cradle, boys, fast to and fro;
Working your hand about,
Shifting the sand about,
Seeking for treasures that lie hid below.

And so on. The verse was not written in the highest possible style of art, but it might be interesting to know how many young fellows went out of England with that doggerel in their ears and on their tongues. Joe was only one out of many

who made it a part of the Litany sung at Gold's great shrine.

He cashed Uncle George's cheque at Lloyd's bank, and drew the hundred pounds in sovereigns, influenced, I fancy, by those gold-digging visions. Paper is but a poor medium between riches and poverty, after all. You may be able to translate it into gold, but it has not gold's magic, and can exert but little of gold's charm. I am nothing of a money-lover, but I do yet care somewhat for the round ring of minted gold, and find a something sibilant in the rustle of bank paper, as though that rustle whispered, "Soon shall I fly." With the hard gold in a lump in his inner breast-pocket, tied in a chamois leather bag, Joe wandered down to the station and awaited the arrival of the coach. By some accident, for the days were leisurely, and people gave themselves plenty of time for most things, the sound of Old Tom's horn came tootling into New Street a quarter of an hour beyond its usual time, and the train was already puffing to begone. Joe had secured his ticket, and now fell upon his luggage, called a porter, impetuously bade him get these things into the London train, saw them hurriedly labelled, took his seat just in time, and was swallowed up by the darkness of the tunnel before he had looked round him to observe his fellow-passengers. Light breaking in anew, revealed the florid countenance of Mr. Sydney Cheston, who held out his hand

with a loud greeting. Joe took it, a little shamefacedly, but his friend was determined to make light of the affair of the previous day, and was even ostentatiously hearty. At Coventry they were left alone, and, having bribed the guard with half-a-crown (after the manner of young British gentlemen before Brinsley Sheridan's grandson gave us the good gift of smoking-carriages), they began to smoke at a great rate; and it befell that in the course of the journey Joe opened his heart, and, having first apologised once more, went on:—

"I'm in a deuce of a mess, old fellow. To tell the truth, I was in a wretched bad temper all day yesterday, or I should never have behaved as I did to you——"

"Don't say a word about it," Cheston said; "I didn't mean to hurt you, but it was my fault."

Then the young men shook hands, and Joe went on again:—

"When I got home there was a parson there. He's not a bad fellow for a parson, and I'm very sorry for what happened, but I was in an infernal temper, and he insulted me, and was horribly trying and annoying, and all that sort of thing; and, gad, sir, I knocked him down!"

Cheston stared hard at Joe and burst out laughing.

"What a fire-eater you are, Bushell," said he. "Excommunication, you know. That sort of thing."

"He was a Nonconformist parson," said Joe.

guiltily, "and really, in cold blood, I've a great deal of respect for him."

The irreverent Cheston screamed with laughter, and by-and-by asked breathlessly:

"You must have had a row about it?"

"A row!" said Joe ruefully. "My mother told me either to apologise or leave the house and never go back again. It was impossible."

"Especially under compulsion," said Cheston, still laughing. "If apologies were as plenty as blackberries, I wouldn't give an apology under compulsion. Well?"

"Well," Joe returned, "the long and the short of it is, I'm on the way to America."

"No!" cried Cheston.

"Yes," said Joe stolidly, "I'm on the way to America." Then cheering a little, "I shall try my luck on the Pacific side, amongst the nuggets."

"By George, you know," said Cheston, surveying him with an eye of admiration and envy, "I should like that. What a lark it *would* be. No," he added sorrowfully, "the governor wouldn't listen to it. In the words of Shenstone, or something like 'em—

I should like for to follow you there,
And to toil where the gold-nuggets breed;
But papa would be ready to swear,
And——

Hang it all! I'm full of these momentary flashes of genius. Aha! Got him!—

And I know that I shouldn't succeed!

Besides, my son, I haven't got the rhino. But are you really going? When?"

"I'm really going, and I'm going now," said Joe. "Now, at once."

"I suppose," said Cheston, striving purposely to bury Joe's angry meanness of the day before, "I suppose you remember that I owe you something? Thirty odd pounds, I think it is. If you'll come round with me, I'll let you have it."

"Well," said Joe, striving also to wipe out that ugly remembrance, "if you don't mind, Cheston, I'd rather you kept it until I ask you for it. I have enough to begin with, but I might get hard up, and in that case it would come in usefully. You be my banker, and when I find myself in danger of wanting the coin I'll send for it."

"Good," said Cheston; and the two began to talk about California, and told each other what they knew of it—which was mostly more marvelous than true.

"But what," asked Cheston, "induced you to come to London? Isn't Liverpool the nearest way?"

"Why, yes," said Joe, "I suppose it is. But—" there he blushed a little, "you see it's altogether a little sudden for a fellow, and—and, in point of

fact, I never made up my mind until I started to walk into town to catch this train. London is the first place a man tends to, you know, and it's a sort of axle whose spokes radiate to everywhere."

"Well," said Cheston, with that happy-go-lucky spirit which distinguishes the average young Englishman, and perhaps helps to make him what he is—the wonder of the world for pluck, and dash, and enterprise—"it doesn't matter a great deal where a man goes, so long as he has the right stuff in him, and sticks to what he takes to."

"I'm not going to be beaten," said young Joe valiantly. "Money isn't everything in the world; and if I can't get much of it, I must do with little."

"Oh yes," Cheston answered, "and besides that, your governor will turn up trumps at the finish. You're the only son, I think?"

"The only child," said Joe, with a tremor on his lip. "I mustn't stay away too long, after all, for they're both getting old, and a little bit frail, and it wouldn't be nice to come back and find them gone."

"You must write to 'em," Cheston answered cheerfully.

The conversation languished. Young Joe's heart once more began to fail him. He had fairly started now, and going back was more than ever

impossible until he had at least done something. With little further speech they came to London, and went down to the luggage-van together to secure their belongings. Cheston's came out first. Then, after a long delay, came one of Joe's properties—his chest. Then, after another pause, the van was cleared, and there was no sign of his portmanteau.

"Must have been put out at Rugby, sir," said the porter in answer to the young man's claim. "We can send back for it. Where shall we send it, sir?"

Joe gave his address at an hotel in Covent Garden, and was driven thither in a hackney coach. Cheston accompanied him, and that night they dined together. In the morning Joe made inquiries as to the easiest and quickest way to California, and learned little that was likely to be of practical use of him, for he had no idea as to the right way of going about the business, and wandered rather listlessly about the docks, standing promiscuous treat to nautical-looking men who appeared to have nothing special on their hands. The best way, he concluded, would be to get to New York, and make a start for the gold fields thence. The route to New York at least was clear. Meantime, back to the hotel to see if the lost portmanteau had arrived, and, in case it had, to send the certificate of marriage to Dinah. For it was characteristic of young Joe that, at the

moment at which the portmanteau was known to have disappeared, he was resolved that it held the certificate, though whilst it remained in his possession he was most mournfully sure it did not.

No portmanteau for him at the hotel. No news of it at the railway station. No news of it next day, and next day still no news. And on the Thursday night the fast-sailing clipper ship "Orinoco" dropped down the Thames, and the portmanteau was finally left behind—and with it the last hope of Dinah's peace? Not so, young Joe inwardly declared. Cheston was with him on the deck, and was prepared to go as far as Greenwich, to keep heart and hope in him at the start.

"We'll have a bottle of champagne, Bushell, for doch an dhorras," says that young gentleman cheerfully.

Joe accedes, and they go below, and with laughter and clinking of glasses and good wishes and high hope they drink to each other.

"And here," cried Cheston, "here is the Rose of the Midlands, coupled with the name of the gentleman who will shortly return from Tom Tiddler's ground with his pockets full of nuggets."

Joe laughed, a little constrainedly, and drank, murmuring into the glass a word of tenderness for Dinah. He would fain have given his confidence to Cheston, but something withheld him, some fear perhaps of breaking down, or some

childish dread of seeming sentimental, or reluctant about going at this final moment.

"You'll let me know how you get along," says Cheston; "and," drawing him aside, "you'll claim the coin whenever you want it, you know."

"All right," Joe nodded in return. New clinking of glasses, new good wishes. Wine makes the heart glad and the face to shine, and sets the little cords within tingling and ringing to tunes tender and hopeful, mournful and triumphant. On deck again, the inward orchestra playing "Good bye, Sweetheart," "The Emigrant's Farewell," and "Cheer, Boys, Cheer," in a strange laughing tearful medley. Steadfast lights ashore and shifting lights afloat, shining reflected on the transparent gloom of the river, many a time to be recalled by fancy, and looking already memorable and unlike anything seen before. Greenwich and "good-bye"—the little boat dancing shoreward into darkness, the great black hulk sliding sullenly down the river and towards the open sea.

And now for the first time in his life young Joe felt alone. A man may be alone a thousand times without feeling it, or may feel it in spite of society. There are certain normal conditions of nature which we do our best to leave unrecognised. Silence is one, darkness another, solitude a third. We make raids into silence with a tremulous defiance, as a boy whistles to keep his heart up when walking in the dusk through a churchyard.

We defy darkness in the feeblest ways, and she has her own in spite of us. One of these days she will creep at an extinguished sun and stifle the fading stars. And as for solitude, every human soul is so alone that no other can get into reach of it, but we make pretence of being gregarious and we forget our fears. These three great negatives, silence and darkness and solitude, are the eternal background against which we fantoccini disport ourselves, for Heaven knows whose amusement. We huddle together to forget these gruesome everlasting negatives; but when we are for a moment severed from the crowd, how the knowledge of them swoops down and shrivels us! Solitude, silence, darkness on the sea, and the hapless young Joe in the middle of them.

He had never been at sea before, and he suffered physically. The Reverend Paul Screed was avenged already, and could he have appreciated his enemy's miseries, he would have been more than ready to forgive. Surely, thought Joe, there was nothing in the world—nothing, nothing—which could make it worth while to endure this helpless horrible nausea, this fruitless revolt of soul and body against a universe suddenly grown hideous and unbearable. "Ah, death I'd gladly welcome," sings the melodious Italian tenor in florid declamation to Leonora. Young Joe had no heart to sing it, but he groaned it, as with heavy eyes and pea-green countenance he lay in his

berth surrendered to misery. Only one man in a hundred tastes the awful possibilities of seasickness, but Joe was the one in the hundred who sailed aboard the "Orinoco," and the ship's look-out had sighted Kinsale Head before he was better. Then he began to recover pluck and appetite together, and the remainder part of the voyage went pleasantly enough. When a man has been as penitent for three or four days as he had been, penitence is apt to be worn a little threadbare. There is no emotion which cannot be out-worn, and Joe had got through his stock of repentances too speedily perhaps. I knew a schoolboy whose one gustatory passion was cheese. Once being possessed of a spare half-crown, he bought an egregious lump of Gruyère, and attacked it in the solitude of his chamber, and ate until he could eat no more.

He has arrived now at man's estate, that schoolboy; and his youthful feast was enjoyed years and years ago, but if you show him Gruyère at this day you almost drive him from the table. He ate enough to last him for his lifetime. In like manner, young Joe was so greedy of remorse that his four days' feast of woe lasted him the voyage and for some time beyond it.

He landed in due time in New York, and before he had set foot upon American ground

the crushing sense of solitude had retired in favour of an exhilarating feeling of independence.

He had already been so long absent from Dinah without sending her a message that he felt it unworthy to write now until he had begun to do something to atone for absence and silence. He was a little dismayed to discover that he was as far off from California, practically, as ever, and that he had not money enough to go there, except in the roughest and meanest way. Then, people with whom he talked set the chances before him in a discouraging manner, and, in brief, his money melted with surprising swiftness, and, though employment was plentiful enough for those who knew how to work, he knew how to do nothing, and therefore got nothing to do. He wrote to Cheston and to Uncle George. Cheston kept his promise and sent the money he owed, and that also melted. Uncle George wrote a letter, which he took the precaution to post in Birmingham, lest the local postmaster should know the lad's address. In this epistle he set forth his deep sorrow at the fact that his brother and his sister-in-law were still implacable. Young Joe's resolve to emigrate—according to Uncle George—had been the last straw which broke the camel's back, and they were now irreconcilable. The writer expressed his deepest regret for young Joe's prospects, but he sent no money.

Then came two or three days' semi-starvation

in New York, then an engagement as firemender at a brick-kiln some miles outside the city. This business in a rough and squalid way held body and soul together, but there was no chance of making a home for Dinah out of it. And so Dinah was still unwritten to, and the days and weeks and months went by. He had new remorsees, but he had his work to do and his bodily discomforts to endure, and by-and-by memory grew less poignant. After some months he fell in with a lumber ganger, and went with him to the Dominion and lived a rough backwood life, hardening his hands and toughening his muscles and growing a great beard. Anybody seeing him would never have recognised the spruce young Midland dandy, and he had almost forgotten himself.

By this time he was ashamed and afraid to write to Dinah. He was very unhappy about her often. He was very tender and sore in his thoughts about her always. But he never wrote, and he began to hope that she would forget him, and carry on her life without him. In one of his rare letters to Uncle George, a couple of years after leaving England, he mentioned Dinah so particularly that the old fox suspected him of an inclination to come back again. So he wrote in answer that Dinah Banks had married, and from that time forth he received no letters from his nephew. This rejoiced him, for with every day that passed

he felt his hold upon his brother's fortune surer and more sure.

CHAPTER V.

THE Saracen's Head was a cheerful and comfortable hostel, proffering on its signboard good accommodation for man and beast, and fulfilling its promise liberally within. Sandel floor, huge open fireplace blazing with an enormous fire, after the generous-looking fashion of the mining districts, where coal is cheap and a good fire is counted first of household comforts. Big bare oak beams in the ceiling with flitches of mellow bacon stuck flat across them, ripening to the rasher stage; shining onions in nets and reeves, and hams in canvas jackets bearing them company. Prodigious solid tables of dark oak, much battered by years of rough usage and irregularly gauffed at the edges by idle pocket-knives. Heavy wooden settles, polished by the lounging shoulders of many generations of guests, and staunch to carry generations more. The present assembly—clad in thick flannel jackets thrown open to show the gaudy lining of cheap felt carpeting, heavy ankle-jack boots, mostly worn unlaced, with a big crumpled tongue hanging out, as though the boots were thirstier than their wearers, nondescript hats of felt, shaped like basins and without a pretence of brim—the present

assembly sat smoking and drinking in a quiet contentment almost bovine. It was noticeable that most of the men were blazoned in a singular manner on the face, as if they had been tattooed and the design had been half obliterated. Each man so marked had felt Death's hand upon his cheek once at least. But that was commonplace, every-day, and in the way of business, and as a general thing was not much thought of.

This was the Saracen's common room, and was rather out of the Saracen's own direct line of observation. He swung, with inflamed countenance, portentous turban, unnumbered jewels, and bilious eyes a brighter window round the corner, and behind the brighter window lay a snugger room—a sort of library of liquor, where bottles held the shelves instead of books. It was a mere band-box of a room, and what with its jolly fire and crimson window blind, and its glitter of glass and gilt lettering, it glowed and sparkled on this wintry night with amazing warmth and brightness. For the wind was howling and the Saracen was pitching gustily to and fro outside, and shrieking rustily at the weather, and the rain beat at the windows frantically at times. All this redoubled the inner warmth and brightness, of course, and sent the inmates of the cosy room closer with comfortable shiverings round the fire. The inmates of the room were three in number. On one side of the fire sat an old woman, and on the other a young

one. Between them an old man in a sleeved waistcoat sat back in an armchair and scorched his legs with an aspect of much contentment. He was a fat man with a pale countenance, white hair and a well-filled rotund waistcoat. Every now and then with his fat hands he caressed the rotund waistcoat as if encouraging his digestive faculties, as you pat a horse when he has pleased you. The old woman was ruddy and neat and clean, in an old-fashioned mutch cap with spotless crisp lace edges and having a white silk kerchief drawn squarely over her round shoulders. The young woman was pretty but wistful-looking, her face paler than it should have been; her eyes giving a kindly observer warrant to believe that they were more used to tears than eyes which had a right to be gay by virtue of their brightness and their beauty should be.

"Daniel," said the old lady, "what's the time?"

The old man stole a caressing hand across the rotundity of his figure and pulled out a fat, pale watch. "It's nearhand on ten."

"Time them chaps was goin', then," said the old lady.

"Ah!" said the old man assentingly, "I suppose it is, missis. I suppose it is." He drew his legs from the fire, and stroked them persuasively, as who should say "Will you carry me?" The legs apparently declined, for the feet went back to the

fender, and their owner's hands once more offered a silent recognition of the efforts made by his digestive organs. A long-drawn sigh seemed to admit that he had no wish to hurry them.

"I do declare, our Daniel," said his wife placidly, "you're gettin' lazier every day."

"Very like, missis," assented Daniel, "very like. A mon do't get no suppler at my time o' life."

"I'm ashamed on you, Daniel," said the wife, half vexed, half laughing. "Dinah, light your father's candle, an' send him to bed." The girl rose to obey. The old woman, laying down the knitting which had hitherto occupied her plump white fingers, set her hands upon the elbows of her armchair and made a motion to rise. By that time the struggle between the smile and the frown was over and the smile had won. Her placid and good-humoured gaze followed her daughter's languid motion across the room, when suddenly her hands relaxed their hold upon the chair and she sank back with a look in which terror and suspicion were singularly blended. The girl reached a candlestick from the mantelpiece, crossed the room for a spill of paper, returned, lighted the candle and set it in the old man's hand. Then stooping over him she kissed his cheek, and sat down in her corner. The mother arose and left the room. A moment later her voice was heard.

"Now, Willy-um, your mother'll be a sittin' up for you. George Bethell, you ought to ha'

been a bed an hour ago. Tummas, you're on the night shift, / know, an' it's time as you was gone."

"Let's have another half-gallint, mother," pleaded one solemn roysterer gruffly. It'll on'y be a half-a-pint all round."

"Not another drop o' drink'll be drawed i' this house *this* night," returned the old lady with unusual acidity of tone.

"Missis," responded the young man first addressed, "yo' mote (must not) send Tum whum sober. His ode woman ain't used to it. Her'll have a fit, or summat."

"Haw, haw, haw," from the assemblage. The old lady turned upon the wag with solemn anger.

"Willy-um Bowker," she said, "you'm worse than any on 'em, an' to be so young too. It's known far an' wide as nobody ever got drink to mek him unsteady at the Saracen's Head, neither Tummas Howl nor no man."

"Missis," said the wag with instant propitiation in his tone, "it een't like yo to turn rusty at a joke. But we gone away dry to-night i'stead o' drunk, an' for my part I likin' to be about half-way." A murmur of general approval greeted this statement, and every man seemed to be in favour of the golden mean. But the old lady was inexorable.

"Drunk or dry," she said with much acerbity and decision, "you'll go as you are."

"Come on, chaps," said Mr. Bowker, who as yet was beardless. "Her's as good as a mother to all on us, an' what her says her sticks to. 'Good-night, missis, and no offence,' as Tum said to the windmill last time he fell agen it."

"Good-night, missis," said each grave roysterer as he passed. She answered each by name. "Good-night, 'Minadab. Good - night, Ebenezer. Good-night, Meshach." And so on through a list of the quaintest names, until the last had tramped up the sanded passage and had turned out into the rain. She blew out the candles, bolted the door behind the retiring guests, and returned to the smaller room. The old man had gone upstairs, and the girl was preparing to follow. The staircase, with steps of well-scoured white-sanded wood, opened into this snug little room, and the mother, closing the door, stood with her shoulders against it regarding Dinah. The girl looked at her meekly, but with an air a little startled.

"Our Dinah," said the mother, "I want to speak to you. You'd better sit down." The girl obeyed. "There's somethin' the matter wi' you. What is it?"

"There's nothing the matter with *me*, mother," answered Dinah wearily.

"My gell," said Mrs. Banks advancing, and bending towards her with an anxious, tremulous

severity, "you can't deceive me. There's somethin' the matter."

"No," said Dinah, looking puzzled; "I'm a bit dull. That's all."

"Dinah, you can't deceive an old experienced woman. There's somethin' the matter with you, and somethin' very dreadful. Tell me this minute what it is."

"Oh, mother," said Dinah, in an agitated whisper, "am I going to die?"

"It'd a'most be better if you was," said the mother. Dinah's face was white, and her eyes were wide open with fear, but at this she flushed suddenly, and shrank and cowered, with her arms drawn across her face. Her very ears and neck were red and white by turns, as she bent down.

"Is it that?" she sobbed; "oh, is it that?"

"Dinah! Dinah! you wicked gell," said her mother. "Tell me who it is!" Dinah bent lower and lower, and drew herself away as any defenceless thing draws back into itself at the touch of an intruding finger. Her mother seized one of her hands, and strove to draw it from her face, but Dinah held her head down so resolutely, and drew her arms so tightly towards herself, that the old woman was powerless to effect her purpose. "Tell me who it is!" she repeated severely, relinquishing her hand. "Is it young Joe

Bushell—as has broke his father's and mother's heart, and made a huzzy o' you as well?"

"Oh, mother," cried Dinah, dropping suddenly upon her knees, and seizing the old woman by both hands, "we were married at Waston Church last Whitsuntide." Dinah's mother dropped down upon her knees and faced the girl.

"You was married? At Whitsuntide? You an' young Joe Bushell?"

"Yes," cried the girl, and suddenly releasing her mother's hands, she fell forward upon the floor, and hiding her face again, cried passionately. The elder woman fell forward also, and clipping her by the waist, strove to lift her, but again Dinah would not move. So they knelt there and mingled their tears.

"Dinah," said the mother, whispering, "it never crossed my mind till to-night when you got up to get your father's candle, an' then it come to me at a run. But, Dinah, I'm sorry for you, an' you'll have a bad time wi' your father an' the neighbours. Oh, you poor silly gell not to tell me as you was married! An' now he's gone, the Lord alone knows wheer."

"He'll come back again," sobbed Dinah. "If he's alive, he'll come back again."

"Haven't *you* heerd on him, neither?" asked her mother in surprise and fear.

"No," wept Dinah, "never since the day he

went away. Oh, mother, do you think he's dead? They say he's gone to America, an' he might ha' been drowned at sea, or anything. Oh, I can't think as if he'd been alive he'd ha' left like this. And he promised to send my lines an' all, an' I've never heard a word."

"Dinah," said the mother in a horror-stricken whisper, "haven't you got your lines?"

"No," answered Dinah, still weeping. "He promised to send 'em the day he went away."

Then the mother lifted up her voice and wept aloud.

"Dinah, you're a ruined gell, and I'm a miserable, disgraced old woman!"

The immortal Doctor Marigold remarks that in his father's days "registration hadn't come up much." So far as the knowledge of poor Dinah and her mother went, registration had not come up at all. To this very day, in that part of England in which they lived, there are women who believe that the possession of their "marriage lines" is the only surety of their own honour. To lose their "lines," in the belief of those simple souls, would be to invalidate the marriage ceremony, and to make their children illegitimate. Nor is this curious superstition confined to the downright ignorant classes, as you might fancy. Fairly well-to-do people, who can read the newspaper without spelling the hard words at all, and who would with righteous anger resent the imputation of

ignorance, still stick to the belief. Thirty years ago it was probably general.

Mrs. Banks, landlady of the Saracen's Head, was not by nature an imaginative or an inventive woman. Unless you choose to call the immortal allegories of Bunyan by that name, she had never read a romance in her life. Nowadays Mr. Wilkie Collins is to the fore to help anybody to an elaborate plot upon emergency, and there is, indeed, scarcely a condition of life imaginable upon which modern fiction could not throw a light more or less direct and helpful. But feminine human nature existed on much the same lines as now before the popular novelist came into being. Necessity is the mother of invention, and here if anywhere in the world was a necessity of the sternest sort. At any risk, the family reputation must be saved: at any risk short of crime. It would be surely the very whitest of white lies if the mother could acknowledge her daughter's child as her own, and could thereby save her daughter's reputation. In any case, the material cost of the child's maintenance would fall upon the Saracen, and his shoulders were broad enough to bear without tremor a score of such burdens. Dinah was the only child of her parents, and if she shared in the deceit she could rob nobody. So the old woman mellowed her plan, and slowly turned it over, and then laid it before Dinah.

"Dinah, my dear, we're in a peck o' trouble,

and we shall ha' to get weselves out on it as best we can. It 'ud break thy father's heart to know it, and it mustn't be let get to his hearin' at all."

"How can we help it?" asked Dinah, forlorn and pale.

The old lady revealed her plan in a sentence.

"He must be made to think as the child's mine." Dinah quivered at this. One of those amazing and mysterious instincts which make mothers what they are, awoke in her, and she felt as if her unborn baby were being stolen from her. The mother saw this and understood it, being a mother. "By yourself it'll be all your own. I must tell Daniel as I expect it. He'll be sore amazed, I doubt, but you must get away into the country when the time's comin', an' I must come to see you. Then you'll ha' to write to your father an' say as I'm took ill, an' can't come back again. Then, when it's all o'er, we can come back together, an' nobody 'll think anythin' about it."

From the first moment of Dinah's proclamation of the truth, there had been no shadow of doubt in the mother's mind. She believed the story unreservedly, and when Dinah told it in full, setting forth the errant young Joe's reasons for concealment, she, though her anger burned against

the runaway, forgave her daughter the folly of which she had been guilty.

The winter wore away, and through it all Dinah was kept almost a prisoner. Daniel was not often curious about her, but when he was his wife was equal to the occasion, and satisfied him easily. What should make *him* believe that a plot like the beginning of a melodrama was going on at the Saracen's Head? The spring began to hint that it was coming, and the time drew near.

"Our Daniel," said Mrs. Banks to her husband, "our Dinah is looking a bit delicate, don't you fancy?"

Daniel was a good husband, and agreed with his wife in all things. He had had five-and-twenty years of married life, and found that a policy of general acquiescence kept things smooth.

"Is her?" said Daniel. "Well, I thought I'd noticed it myself."

"I think o' sendin' her to Wardenb'ry," said Mrs. Banks, "for change of air, like. What do *you* say, Daniel?"

"Very well, missis," said that easy man. "It'll do her a bit of good, mayhap, poor wench!"

"Mayhap it will, Daniel," said Mrs. Banks. "We'll go to-morrow."

Daniel was somewhat taken aback by this precipitancy. Commonly at the Saracen's Head a thing was mentioned, discussed, put by, mentioned and discussed again, and put into action long after in

less sleepy places it would have been forgotten. He offered no opposition. He was accustomed to philosophise about women in his own way. "A woman," he had been known to say, "is like a pig. Her'll nayther be led nor drove, an' it's as tryin' to a mon to do one as it is to do the t'other." So, as a rule, Daniel said nothing, but encouraged his digestive apparatus by patting his waistcoat, and let things take their course.

Wardenbury was thirty miles off, and Daniel knew it vaguely as being Coventry way. Mrs. Banks had relatives there, and in the long course of her married life had paid it two or three visits. Daniel used to speak of himself as being "no great hands of a traveller." He had been born at the Saracen's Head, and had never been farther away than Birmingham. But though he was no traveller, and might, had he been a demonstrative man, have run a risk of seeming hen-pecked, he had his feelings as a husband.

"Mother," he advised, "I shouldn't go to Wardenb'ry yet, if I was you. Think o' your condition."

"Think o' your own condition, y'ode timber-head!" returned his wife, 'an' leave me to think o' mine."

"Well, think on it," said Daniel. Mrs. Banks bustled away to tell Dinah that matters were arranged, and to help her to prepare for the journey. The landlord of the Saracen was not in the

least degree offended by his wife's outspokenness. Had she even called upon him to confirm her criticism he would probably have done it.

The morrow came, and Dinah was smuggled into the trap in the back yard. The mother followed. A shock-headed stable-boy called Jabez drove the pair to the railway station, and returned alone. Next morning came a letter to Daniel stating that Mrs. Banks would spend a day or two at Wardenburg.

"I knowed how it 'ud be," said Daniel. "Once let 'em goo a-gaddin' about, an' thee may'st whistle for 'em afore they comin' back again." He had not the remotest suspicion. He had never read anything more romantic than an invoice for wines and spirits, and he had never seen a play. Even if he had, why should he suspect his wife and daughter? The day or two lengthened into a week, and then came the news that he was again a father. His old age was blessed with a son. He took an extra glass or two on the strength of it, and went about with an air of proprietorial gravity, crossed at times by an involuntary smile. Towards evening the neighbours dropped in as usual. Daniel imparted the news and was congratulated. He sat in his big armchair with his hands resting on the crook of a thick walking-stick and his elbows squared, and looked as if he thought that he deserved the congratulations and had earned the applause of the world. There was an air upon

him as of one who might boast if he would, but would not. The little snuggerly was rather better filled than common that evening, and the health of the son and heir was drunk pretty frequently. Daniel could do nothing less than join. Liquor took little effect upon him: he was accustomed to it, and his inner man was toughened to its assaults. It floated his smile to the surface a little oftener, that was all. But when closing time came, and he was left alone, he gave vent to his joy and triumph. He struck his stick upon the floor with both hands and arose; and laughed long and loud.

"Ha, ha, ha!" cried Daniel, shaking and beaming; "theer's life in th' ode dog yit."

That night shock-headed Jabez had to guide the landlord upstairs, but on the morrow the old man had accepted the position of affairs, and awaited the arrival of the infant and his mother with an approach to phlegm. He had never received many letters, and had never had occasion to write many. The lack of correspondence did not affect him. Dinah wrote once or twice, but that was all, and mother and daughter came back with the infant, after little more than a month from the date of their departure. Dinah's restoration to health seemed little less than miraculous. Her languid heavy step was changed for one light and full of energy. Her face beamed and bloomed once more, and there was no trace of grief in her

eyes. And surely never was sister so passionately devoted to a late-born brother who came to step in between herself and wealth. For old Daniel—who, in a quiet way, was very well-to-do — made no secret of his intent to leave everything to the young stranger. He was ludicrously proud of the baby, and used to rock him in his cradle or watch him as he yelled and fought against milk-warm water and soap, or crowed, in better moods, for kisses in his elder sister's lap. Dinah never allowed him to crow in vain. The old man was amazed sometimes by the almost savage fervour of the kisses with which she mumblingly devoured the little pink body and the podgy little face and hands. Mrs. Banks and her daughter between them attended to the infant's wants with amazing ardour, and sometimes almost quarrelled for the possession of him.

Once Daniel overheard a colloquy between them.

"Dinah," said her mother, in a half-cross, half-appealing tone, "you might let me nurse the babby now an' then."

"He's mine," said Dinah defiantly.

"Why, Dinah," cried Mrs. Banks, seeing the old man looking in at the door, "a body might think as you was the mother as bore him. Give me the child, I tell thee." A meaning look passed between them. Dinah understood, and surrendered little George. But scarcely a day passed in

which she was not in danger of betraying herself. She would sit for hours and hours poring over the little red snub-nosed baby face, reading a likeness to the absent Joe in features where your eye or mine could have discovered no atom of resemblance, and where she found one clearer than the truest photograph the sun made. It was curious and yet natural how the presence of the child atoned for the absence of the father. And yet there was a terrible cruelty in it. The child would never learn to call her Mother.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Rebecca Bushell took her ultimatum to young Joe, then packing up for departure in his bedroom, she saw, lying upon the bed, an old light overcoat, with its pockets turned inside out. In those pockets Joe had made a hasty search for the certificate, and, not finding it, had cast the coat aside. The mother walked into the son's empty room next morning. It was just as he had left it the night before. All the drawers had been taken bodily from the chest, and were stacked disorderly on each other beside it. The mother, by matronly instinct, began to abolish disorder, crying silently the while. Then wiping her eyes with her apron and looking round to see if all

were straight, she noticed the light overcoat thrown across the bed. With native tidiness she took up the coat and straightened it, and observing a rent in one of the pockets, drew out a housewife and sat upon the bed to repair that slight mischief; folding the coat carefully, she placed it in one of the drawers, smoothed the pillows, adjusted the hangings of the bed, and left the room.

This empty chamber became sacred to motherly prayers and tears thereafter, when many heavy months had gone by, and young Joe's silence had not been broken. Many a time she knelt there and followed him into she knew not what of danger and temptation, and many a time she opened the drawer to look at the coat, which was the only relic her only child had left her. By mutual consent of sorrow, husband and wife spoke little of the absent son; but old Joe would yet break out at times, with a shake of his head:—

“Becky, you was too hard on the lad.”

“Joseph,” Rebecca would answer, “he that spareth the rod hateth his son, but he that loveth him chastiseth him betimes.”

“Yes,” old Joe would say in return, “that's well enough, but you was too hard on the lad.”

So Rebecca bore alike her own burden and a load which was not hers. She had but one way with all her troubles—to cast them on the hands of that vast, vague, cruel, unfatherly Fatherhood who was the refuge of His chosen, and the

scourge and overwhelming terror of all others. She went into her son's room, and there knelt down, and poured out her soul in silent tears; and after a while, seeing how she grieved, old Joe troubled her no more.

The reverend Paul Screed was less reticent.

"It is ordained," he would say, "that the saints shall be troubled, lest they become too much absorbed by the world;" and by a thousand platitudes of the sort he strove to console the inconsolable, probing a wound which could only heal by rest. The Reverend Paul was a good man, and tried hourly to be better than he was, but he had no touch of tact in all his clumsy nature. I looked up to him in my youth, and I respect his memory now, but I could find it in my heart to wish him and his kind an island to themselves, where they should vex none out of their own communion. Yet, within six months of the day on which young Joe departed from his native town, the minister did as noble a thing as lay within him to do. He sat once more at meat with old Joe and his wife, and dinner being over, the minister cleared his voice with a sorrowful "Ahem," and addressed his host and hostess.

"Mr. Bushell and Madam," he said, with a certain stiff formality which perhaps was the only manner which left speech possible to him, "it is part of our mortal burden to reflect that we have laid it chiefly upon ourselves. One part of my

burden is that I helped to bring a heavy and an undeserved trouble upon people whom I value, and people who have borne my injury without an angry word. Even whilst I thought I was doing my duty as a minister of the Word, I was but revenging myself for certain slights and thoughtless witticisms which your now errant son had vented upon me. I spoke in anger and in bitterness, and I spoke, as I have since had reason to believe, on no sufficient grounds. And it has been borne in upon me, my friends, that although it is unhappily beyond my power to undo the wrong I did, it is still my duty to confess it humbly before you, and to beg your Christian forgiveness. I have long since forgiven the blow with which your son retaliated upon my sour impertinences. I trust that he has forgiven me my part. I confess my wrong-doing, and I ask, humbly and with deep sorrow, for your pardon."

Mrs. Bushell had never been so near disliking the Reverend Paul as she was at that minute, for she had long since formed her judgment and forgiven, and this appeal set the old wound aching.

"Parson," said old Joe, "say no more about it. There was faults all round."

"Ah, Joseph," said Mrs. Bushell with tears in her eyes, "it's too late now, but I should have been a glad woman at this minute if you'd said me nay when I was that cruel to poor Joe."

"I'm master i' this house," said old Joe, "and

what I ought to ha' done would ha' been to ha' gi'en him a lickin' theer an' then, an' said no more about it."

When they had time to think about it, husband and wife respected the minister the more for his candid and manly confession, but neither that nor any other reparation could bring back young Joe, who now began to live in the regard of those three with something of the martyr's halo about him. The neighbourhood knew the story, of course, and the neighbours put their own constructions upon it. Those who went to Ebenezer Chapel, in which edifice the Reverend Paul habitually discoursed, held with their pastor. Those who went to Church, and those who went nowhere—the vast majority—held for the most part with young Joe, and made a hero of him as well as a martyr. Had the young fellow returned within any reasonable time after his escapade, he would have been encountered by precisely that kind of qualified laudation with which it is now the practice of this enlightened and steadfast country to greet its home-returning warriors or colonial governors.

In those days of decent poverty when she first gave her hand to old Joe, and set up house-keeping with him, Rebecca had mastered the practice of all virtues of industry, and even in later years, when her husband became wealthy beyond the wildest and most extravagant hopes of his

class, and when she might have surrounded herself with an army of servants had she chosen it, she still performed all but the roughest work of the household with her own hands. I like to think of the erect, personable woman in her afternoon black silk, looking, as she sat in state in the little parlour, almost too lofty for approach. At such times, when the scrubbing, scouring, and dusting, the washing, baking, mending, cooking—whatever may have been the business of the day—was done with she would sit there above her big Bible or the "Holy War," in which volume, as I remember, she took an especial and unique delight, and would resign herself to a stern and stately meditation on holy things. Whilst young Joe was with her he vexed her often, and her heart ached with fear for his future many a time. But now that he was gone and gave no sign, these daylight vigils became a prolonged and prayerful pain to the mother's heart. Old Joe, who had no taste for parlours, would sit and smoke gloomily and alone beside the kitchen fire. He too had his dreary vigils, troubled, certainly, by no such spiritual agonies as his wife endured, but unlighted by those flashes of pious hope which sometimes illumined her spirit. Now and then Brother George would look in, and, wooden as he was, some qualms of conscience touched him, beholding the desolation he had helped to bring about. I do not wish, as I have intimated, to paint George in the darkest

sort of colours. He had not enough of virtuous instinct to be a villain. There was nothing in him for himself to sin against.

"It's the best thing in the world as could happen to him." Thus George meditated respecting young Joe. It is the mean man's tribute to honour, the rogue's admission of the beauty of justice, that he cares to justify himself in his own mind. "It'll make a man of him, an' he'll have me to thank for it. It's a precious poor chance I've got o' seein' that hunderd pound again. Eh dear, but I allays *was* a fool wi' my money." Thus he held his head in the sand, and persuaded himself that his conscience did not see him—an attitude more common than the superficial student might suppose.

It became more and more evident, as time went on, that old Joe and Rebecca his wife were breaking. Trouble told upon the woman earlier than upon the man, for though she bore it better, she suffered more intensely. She fell into languor. The household work, once gone through with such swift bustle, had to be committed to a stranger's charge; she spent more of her time in her bedroom, and old Joe sat, feeling lonelier than ever, by the kitchen fire.

Rebecca, though few people guessed it, had always been strongly attracted to young people. That young people were not attracted to her was natural enough, perhaps, though she felt it to be hard. But now, in this time of her distress,

Dinah Banks became her chief comfort. The clumsy servant wench, though animated by the best intentions, was a poor attendant in a sick room. A hippopotamus in clogs might have gone about as lightly, and she had one or two special faculties in the way of tumbling over fire-irons, dropping dishes and the like, which were aggravated into supernatural exercise by her own desire to go about the sick-chamber silently. Dinah, light-footed and soft-handed, was a welcome relief to the sufferer's nerves. The more Dinah came, the more Mrs. Bushell cared to have her there, and the better Dinah loved to wait upon her.

The thing which drew Dinah there was the hope that she might hear something of her husband. No news came, but at last, on the anniversary of the day of his departure, Mrs. Bushell for the first time spoke of him.

"It's a year to-day," she said, "since my poor lad went away."

Dinah, whose mind was full of the remembrance of the day (for women are your true keepers of anniversaries, and have other saints' days than are set down in the calender), trembled and turned pale at these simple words. Rebecca, lying with her eyes closed, and her thin hands folded below her chin, went on:—

"We're short-sighted creatures, and there's only one thing as we can be sure of, Dinah. It's all in the Lord's hands."

Then she lay quiet for a while, and Dinah quivered beside her. For not Joe's desertion of her, nor the failure of his promise, nor the danger of disgrace, nor the fact that fate had stolen her child from her, had weaned her heart from young Joe. She would believe no ill of him, but dreaded to hear of terrible mischiefs which had happened to him.

"And now," said the old woman again, "I shan't be here long, and perhaps I shall know more about it where I'm goin' to."

"No," said Dinah, laying a timid hand upon Rebecca's brow, "you must wait long enough to see him come back again. He can't have the heart to stay away for good, if he's alive," and at that Dinah broke out crying.

Rebecca opened her eyes, and her hands parted.

"Dinah, my poor gell!" was all she said.

And Dinah, pierced by a sudden revelation of instinct, read the stately heart of the rigid old Calvinist aright and knew its tenderness. She leaned over the bed, and laid her face softly in Rebecca's bosom, and the old woman and the young one cried together.

"I always knowed," said Rebecca, gliding back into the broadest accent of her childhood, "as you loved him; an' I know as he loved you. An' he wasn't a bad lad at bottom, Dinah, an' he never meant no harm; an' it was my cruel

ways as made him angry wi' religion." The old woman's tears flowed freely, but she went on with no break in her voice. "Yo' seek help where help is to be got. Yo'll see him come back again some day, Dinah, an' yo' must tell him as whatever he did as was wrong his mother forgive him afore her died, an' whatever her did as was wrong to him, her asked yo' t'ask him to forget."

There she ceased again, and lay, stroking Dinah's wet cheek, and feebly drying the girl's eyes. Dinah had an impulse upon her to tell the story of her marriage to young Joe, and the birth of her son, but was restrained by the sense of Rebecca's weakness, and by some misgiving that without her "lines" a strict woman like Mrs. Bushell might regard her as an altogether improper sort of person. In a little time she controlled herself, and sat down, once more, beside the bed. For a time both were silent. Rebecca lay with closed eyes like one asleep, and Dinah had risen to steal from the room, when the sick woman turned her head, saying:—

"Dinah, my dear, theer's only one thing as Joe left behind him. Yo'll find it i' the top long drawer i' the next room. It's a grey-coloured coat. Bring it in to me, there's a good gell: I want to see it again before I die. It's the only thing he left behind him."

Dinah passed into the next room, found

the coat and returned. Rebecca took it from her, unfolded it feebly, and caressed it with her hands.

"It was Joseph's Coat," she said. "When the wicked sons pretended as young Joseph was dead, they brought his coat to Jacob: Joseph's Coat. But he was alive all the time in Egypt, and his father lived to see him rich and well-to-do."

Her mind began to wander, and she fancied that her son stood beside her.

"Yo'll be kind to your father, Joseph," she said, "when you come back from Egypt, and yo'll remember as it's my wish as you should marry Dinah."

Then she slumbered for a while, and Dinah, full of fear and awe, stole downstairs to the kitchen, where old Joe sat in gloomy silence, with an unlighted pipe between his teeth and stared into the ashy bars of the grate.

"There's a great change in her, Mr. Bushell," she said.

Old Joe shook his head sadly.

"I've knowed as it was a-comin'," he said, in a deep inward murmur; "I've seen it a-comin' this many a day."

They passed upstairs together. Rebecca still slumbered. They stood for a time on either side of the bed in silence. By-and-by the dying woman opened her eyes languidly, looked round with no

recognition, plucked feebly at the coat which lay beneath her hands, and then, with the last ray of intelligence which visited her soul in this world, recognised the garment.

"It was Joseph's Coat," she said, and with these words she died.

Old Joe bore his wife's death stonily, and no man could tell whether he grieved or not. The funeral took place on Sunday, and the bereaved husband and his brother George were the only mourners. They walked behind the hearse in long hat-bands and black clothes, saw the dead interred in the squalid graveyard of Ebenezer, and went back together.

"Theer was a will I made," said Old Joe, sitting beside the kitchen fire, "i' my son's favour." He rose and took the document of which he spoke from a sham two volumes in folio of the "History of England," marked on the inside for a chess board. "Me an' Joe," he said, "used to play draughts on that. They used to reckon me a pretty good player, but he could beat my yed off. He was a very good draught-player, was Joe."

He set down the chess-board lingeringly, and tapped it once or twice with his knuckles. Then, seating himself again, he opened the document.

"It was drawed up," he said, "by a lawyer an' all made out proper, this here will was.

Everythin' on my Rebecca's death was to goo without reserve to my son Joseph, except a thousand pound to my brother George. And now there don't seem no son Joseph for it to goo to, an' wheer it does goo I don't care."

At this intimation Brother George's heart experienced a soft and gentle glow. Things were looking well for Brother George. It was a maxim of his that "fine words butter no parsnips," but he knew also that they cost nothing, and he expended a few upon his brother's grief.

"Your piternal feelin's, Joe-ziph, as a man might say, is a playin' on your heart-strings. But theer's many a young man as has stopped away for a year as has come back at the end of it, or, leastways, in the course of time. Preaps he mightn't ha' gone to Merriky after all. He might ha' 'listed."

"He's never wrote to nobody," said Joe, "not all the time he's been away."

"No," said Brother George, with no token of shame; "never a word, as I've heerd on."

The older brother sat silent, looking at the fire, with his massive hands depending loosely between his knees, and the will held between the finger and thumb of each hand. Without any sign of haste or anger, or any new resolve, he tore the document across leisurely, and with no look of emotion laid the two pieces together and tore them through. Then, in the same listless

way, he took the poker, hollowed out the fire a little, pushed the paper fragments into the hollow, and beat down the fire upon them.

Brother George sipped whisky and water to conceal his smile. Any sort of facial demonstration was rare with him, but this action of old Joe's was in its way a foretaste of triumph for the clumsy schemer, and that soft glow of satisfaction warmed his heart so well that he could not keep its reflection from his face. He might have grinned his broadest, for old Joe never looked at him.

"Twelve months to a day," said Joe, with his hands still hanging lax before him, and his eyes upon the fire, "twelve months to a day."

"What was twelve months to a day?" asked the other.

"From the time he went," said old Joe listlessly, "to the time her died." Then he said "Twelve months to a day" again, and was silent for a long time.

A man with an atom of perception in him would have been keenly touched—must have been touched—by the complete forlornness of the old man's face, and voice, and attitude; but George, being by nature wooden, and by cultivation hardened, laid an unsympathetic hand upon his brother's shoulder, and congratulated him.

"I am glad to see you bear it so easy, Joe-ziph."

Old Joe looked at him slowly, dropped his head again, and murmured, "Twelve months to a day."

"Have a glass o' grog," said George. It was not his own liquor, and he could afford to be generous with it. "It'll warm the cockles of your heart, and do you good."

He took the kettle from the hearth, mixed a stiff glass, and set it on the hob beside his brother.

"Jones her maiden name was," said old Joe. "We was married at the parish church. A good wife for five-and-thirty years was my Rebecca. A good wife."

"Yes," said Brother George, "her was a fine personable figure of a woman, and a savin' manager. Yes, Joe, her was all that, an' her's no doubt better off."

To this genially spoken commendation the widower made no answer. Brother George fell to thinking as to what the mourner's fortune might amount to.

In the silence of the room a murmur broke upon his thoughts.

"Eh?" said George.

"It was a twel'month to a day," said old Joe vacantly. "I bain't well, George," he added. "I think I'll goo upstairs an' lay down a bit."

"Ah, do," said Brother George. "And I'll wait here till you've had a rest."

Old Joe, bent strangely, with his massive arms dependent like weights from his broad shoulders, bored his way slowly out of the room, and went heavily upstairs. George sat absorbed in halcyon visions. Two hundred and fifty thousand pounds. Call it two hundred thousand. A wooden man; a dull, slow, unperceptive, unimaginative man. And yet, what visions haunted that dim brain of his and warmed his chilly heart!

The summer afternoon wore down to summer evening, and George took a comfortable tea in his brother's parlour, and returning to the kitchen sat and smoked and sipped his grog, until it grew too dark for him to see the wreaths of smoke which curled about his head. He called to the ruddy servant, who sat alone in the back kitchen.

"Sarah, go upstairs and call the master, there's a good wench."

The girl clamped upstairs and tapped at the sleeper's door. There came no answer, and she rapped again. She called downstairs, saying that she could not make him hear.

"He's pretty sound asleep, then," said Brother George. "Leave him to it. I'll go away home."

He put on the crape-bound hat, and walked gravely to his own house, and slept the sleep of the just. His dreams were bright with the gleam of two hundred thousand pounds. He sat at breakfast in the morning, and the sunbeams

flowing through the window were mellow with the same auriferous shine. There came a hurried knock at the door, and George's servant, being engaged at the back of the house, left her master to answer it. He found his brother's clumsy Black Country serving-wench standing on the doorstep with blanched cheek, and eyes full of terror.

"I've fetched the doctor," she gasped breathlessly, "an' he says he must ha' been dead afore you left the house last night."

George fell back against the wall of the passage.

"Dead!" he gasped; "who's dead?"

"Your brother Joseph," said the girl.

HERE THE PROLOGUE CLOSES.

CHAPTER VII.

FOUR-AND-TWENTY years have gone by since the prologue opened; old Joe and his wife have lain side by side in Ebenezer Graveyard for years three-and-twenty. The baby is a young man with moustaches and a sweetheart, and his mother is getting on towards middle age, if an earthly pilgrimage of forty-two years may be supposed to have borne a pretty woman so far. Daniel's thin legs nowadays will scarcely carry him, and he is more than eighty years of age. His wife died half a score of years ago, and took her pious fraud to the grave with her. Errant Joe's uncle George is over sixty, and is mightily prosperous and somewhat swollen out with worldly grandeur. For over a score of years nobody has heard of errant Joe, and to the minds of his contemporaries he is as dead as Nebuchadnezzar. To Dinah he remains an unchangeable, fixed

figure. Whilst other young men have grown into middle age, whilst they wear garments of the fashion of 1874 and have grown wizened or burly according to their nature, young Joe in her remembrance remains in the garb in which she last beheld him: no older, no stouter or thinner; a blue-eyed young fellow still, with blooming cheeks and a downy bit of whisker. If anywhere alive, young Joe is five-and-forty by this time, and young Joe no longer; but in Dinah's remembrances of him, Time stands still. In short, madam, you were just married when the tale opened, and yesterday you cried and smiled at the wedding breakfast of your second daughter. And you, sir, were in a round jacket and a broad collar at Eton, with no notion that the wave of a Conservative reaction would drift you into Parliament to denounce the Opposition in well-prepared impromptu epigram, or to demand from your place to be instructed by the right honourable gentleman at the head of Her Majesty's Government. A great space of time. Let it pass in this story — as it passes in much more tremendous chronicles — like a breath.

Dinah Banks, or Bushell, was a simple-minded woman, and all these years she had passively defrauded herself and her child of a great fortune which was legitimately theirs. George, her son, was not the sort of person to be defrauded of any rights he knew of, but he was as ignorant of

these as poor Sir Roger before this time proved himself to be of his dear mother's Christian name. Since Daniel's early days, times had changed a good deal. He had little sympathy with the new crotchet of education; but it is hard for simple folks like Daniel to swim against the tide, and the lad went to the great Grammar School in Birmingham and swallowed his modicum of Latin and Euclid and Algebra, and grew up quite a superior young person, with a natural disdain for home associations and a genuine contempt for his putative father which would have done credit to a princely fairy changeling. Daniel humoured the lad in everything, as old fathers sometimes will humour sons; and the boy himself bullied where he could, and had his own way royally when he was sure of it. As he grew up, the fraud his mother had practised bore very bitter fruit. Her child scorned her in spite of her tenderness, and spoke scoffingly of her as an old maid with old-maidish fancies when she would stay him from participation in this or that boyish freak or folly. I have not the heart to tell how she suffered and in what mean ways. Things that to a sister would have been little troubles magnified themselves to the mother's heart, and every day in all these dreary years her soul cried out for the child's love, and yearned unsatisfied. It was a proof, perhaps, of great sweetness of nature that she remained comely still, and that even in some eyes

she grew more beautiful as Time touched her. It was commonly said of her that she wore a motherly rather than an old-maidish air, and, indeed, she had grown buxom and a little portly. Her eyes were sad, but wonderfully sweet and affectionate. She had offers of marriage in profusion; but declined them all, for no reason that the neighbours could divine, and lived solely for her child and her memories of his father. There are among women many thousands of such faithful hearts, who suffer much, but have their reward now and then even in this hard world.

Visible from the upper bed-room windows of the Saracen is a range of hills, of perhaps twelve or thirteen hundred feet elevation, the only notable thing in the landscape. They are not more than four miles away, and they naturally draw the eye of a stranger from the surrounding dead level. Under the shadow of that low range of hills, on the farther side, lies as charming a bit of country as you may look for in a quiet way in England—a rich undulating landscape, with meadow and and cornfield, and noble timber here and there, all gathering an added charm from the fact that by a walk of half a mile you may command a view of another valley, lurid with vast columns of fiery smoke and the red tongues of furnace flame that leap at the low skies. Lying in any field about that pleasant stretch of country on a quiet day in summer, beneath skies whose blue is some-

what toned by the thin gauze of outlying smoke-clouds, you may hear afar off the great heart of giant Labour beating; and standing still at night, when sound travels farther, you can catch the clank of iron and the shuddering roar or shriek of distant engines, or even the dull thud of the forge hammer. And even in the pleasant valley itself, when you might fancy that you had strayed unaware into the very heart of Agricola's realm, when the ferns are unrolling their crown-like scrolls, and the dog-rose is opening from the bud, and the air is sickly sweet with the heavy scent of the may, you come saunteringly to a little rise and look about you, and you see pit-stacks in the distance sending up their blue curls of smoke, and pit frames with gliding chains above them, filmy-fine.

On the lower slope of one of these hills I know a farmhouse, so old that its outside walls have grown grey and rimy like the rind of a Stilton cheese. Great beams of timber cross its front, and here and there its lines have swayed picturesquely out of their first prim drawing. Dormer windows peep from the roof: the chimney stacks are Elizabethan, but the rest of the house is a sort of architectural dream made concrete. The building is all gables and corners outside, and within there are little flights of unexpected stairs in unexpected places, and a stranger finds himself intruding on rooms

in which he has no business, and wondering how they got there. All the windows are diamonded, and the panes held together by little strips of lead. The floors are sunken in a curious way, and the inner walls warp to this side or that in such a fashion as to give you an impression of being somehow in a house at sea. But the old place is solid and sturdy, pinned together as it is by its huge oak beams, and it may stand for hundreds of years yet in defiance of wind and weather.

Behind this fine old house there is a fine old garden, where in their season ten-week-stocks and gilly-flowers and bachelor's buttons and other such homely blossoms grow with roses red and white, and lilies pale and golden. Here are hoary apple-trees bearing wonderful fruit, plum-trees, pear-trees, and a little forest of gooseberry bushes. And in great strips between the flower-beds, or edged round with flowers and tangled aromatic bushes, there are spaces set apart for the culture of the homely cabbage and cauliflower, the pungent eschalot and others of its tribe. Everything seems more or less entangled with everything else in this delightful, disorderly old garden. The sides of its walks are edged with box and moss-grown, and its high brick walls, mellow with age, are thick with lichens. Walking here on any summer day you are at liberty to forget that there is any such thing as a forge, a foundry, a

coal-mine, a smoke-cloud in the world. Yet even here, if you listen closely, you may hear great Labour's muffled heart beat two or three miles away, and beyond the hills at night-time the sky is livid red. There are gardens as old-fashioned and profuse in growth in many places, I dare say—gardens where the same homely blossoms blow, and the same scents perfume the air, and the same spirit of retired Quiet dwells; but they lack the charm of this retreat for the most part, because they have not its singular contrast of neighbourhood. When by good chance you meet amongst those "fair Circassians," of whom so many fables have been told, a woman with any decent pretensions to good looks—when you see a star glinting through the late-divided storm-wrack—when you see the pearl upon the Ethiop's arm—when you see (if ever you do) Mr. Leigh Hunt's beautiful symbol of the lily in the mouth of Tartarus—you know what advantages you expect to get out of contrast. Those advantages are here, in this old garden's neighbourhood, with smoke and fire, and the amazing travail of the earth about it.

The Donne family had lived in the old house for many generations and farmed the land which surrounded it. The fact that in the parish church-yard there was a tombstone bearing their name, and dated as far back as the year 1613, proved that the family was substantial and respectable

more than two centuries ago. At the beginning of the seventeenth century it was not everybody who was honoured with a tombstone. The stones came down from that date almost without a break;—John Aldley Dunne succeeded by John Aldley Dunne for nigh a hundred years, and being followed by other Johns whose J's had long and curly tails. It was at the beginning of the curly-J period that the spelling of the names was changed, Audley being substituted for Aldley and Donne for Dunne. There were many Dunne Aldleys, too, buried in the churchyard, and the two families had evidently been somehow tied together.

In the year 1870 the male branch of the Donnes became extinct, and there were now left but two women to bear the old name—Mrs. Donne, a notable woman, widow of the late farmer, and her daughter Ethel. Now, in that part of the country people go, as a rule, for Scriptural appellations, and the old English feminine names are neglected. It may perhaps be accepted as corroborative of other evidence in favour of some old standing in the family that it held a distinctive feminine name again and again and again repeated. Below the record of John Aldley Dunne's years and virtues ran this legend: "Alsoe Ethyl hys wyfe, aetat 48, obitt June 2, 1621. Alsoe Ethyl, infant child of ye above." When the present Ethel was christened, Mr. Borge,

her godfather, had objected to the name as bringing ill-luck with it. He founded himself on tombstone evidence, and pointed out the fact that four Ethels had died in maidenhood. His superstitions were derided; but Mr. Borge always protested "he knowed ill 'ud come on it," and was the more firmly fixed in his belief by the fact that the baby suffered from convulsions while teething. A pretty smart attack of croup and some extra trouble in regard to measles currently held to have justified the Borgian vaticinations. But the baby grew to girlhood, and the girl became a young woman, without anything more terrible than those infant maladies encountered by the way.

Ethel Donne was nearly nineteen years of age, and a very charming and beautiful young woman. Her beauty was not of the kind you see in London drawing-rooms or at the opera, but much more robust and blooming and delicate. Her complexion bore looking at, and was admirably waterproof. Ill-natured young women, her compeers, said that her hair was "carroty," from which I desire you to argue that it was of the colour painters have loved to paint—

In gloss and hue the chestnut when the husk
Divides three-fold to show the fruit within,

as Mr. Tennyson says. Her eyes were hazel and full of mirth and white; not the dead lily colour which poets have so often and so falsely feigned,

but white rose with the faintest live blush in it. Her features were not those of a Greek statue, fortunately, but they were fairly regular. The dear little nose, in particular, was very daintily modelled, and her lips and teeth — to speak of rubies and pearls is to desecrate the beauties of flesh and blood and ivory. To see her figure at its full advantage you should perhaps have beheld her in the act of hanging out the family washing to dry in that old garden, or with a hayrake in the meadows. To say that she was unaware of her manifold natural advantages would be to portray her as a very foolish young person. Shakespeare thought fit to put into the mouth of a fool the statement that there never was fair maid but made mouths in a glass; but it is probable that he himself believed it. For one prodigy of nature you can show me where a pretty young woman honestly thinks herself plain, I will undertake to find you five hundred natural-minded, lovable young women who, being passably plain, think themselves pretty; and a very proper and kindly ordinance of nature this provision is. Let us think well of ourselves and be happy. The male animal has no right to conceit himself on the score of personal modesty. A very popular writer of essays, who is not beautiful, has made confession in print that he feels a pleasurable sensation in looking at his own reflection in a mirror. I may not have the courage to follow his bold example with a like confession.

But more than mere good sense, of which she had plenty, her own free nature saved her from the canker of self-consciousness, and she had a certain merry scorn of mere personal vanity. She was country-bred, but not unpolished, though unvarnished. She had a natural art in music, cultivated, not to perfection, but to a fair growth; and, being natural with her, it enabled her to accompany a singer with grace and fineness, and to sing a simple ballad in a way which even cultured listeners found attractive. Her secular music was mostly antiquated, and was made up chiefly of the songs of Purcell and Shield and Arde, with one or two of Haydn's canzonets. Her knowledge of sacred music went little further than "The Messiah," "The Creation," and Mozart's "Twelfth Mass" would carry her. She read French fairly well; but her knowledge of the literature of that language was confined to Lamartine's "Heroes and Heroines of the Revolution" and Volney's "Ruins of Empire." Notwithstanding the latter, she was orthodox. M. Volney, after the elegant rhapsodies with which he opens, was, indeed, for the most part Greek to her.

In household virtues she was a treasure, and was mistress of all the arts of the dairy. She made rare butter and the crispest, lightest pastry; and knew how, if called upon, to wash and bake, and even brew. I remember her mother's damson cheese, and they say that Ethel was her mother's

mistress. In short, a charming girl, with rare housewifely qualities, and fit to make a prince a wife, if princes had the good luck to be allowed to choose, as we happy plebeians have.

It is not to be supposed for a moment that all these charms and virtues were allowed to lie unclaimed by the adventurous young manhood of the region. Lovers clustered around her like flies about a honeypot, else were she no fit heroine of mine. The Quarrymoor farm ran into three hundred acres, and every inch was freehold, and she the heiress of it. Why should she not be courted?

The parish church was so situate that there was a pleasant walk to it in summer time from three or four parishes in the neighbourhood, and gay young bachelors from several townships, with their sisters and sweethearts, would troll out on peaceful Sunday evenings, after a four-o'clock dinner, and save themselves from any sense of spending the day unfittingly by dropping in at the Old Church, and would then saunter home again in the calm dusk, refreshed by a glance at country green and a taste of country air. Ethel drilled the choir and played the wheezy organ, and had delight in this part of her life. She searched for voices far and near, and strove to impress their owners into her band, and by-and-by got up quite a respectable assemblage of singers. Then it was decided that the organ should be replaced

— you heard the bellows wheeze and rattle even when the instrument was in full blast; and it was settled between Ethel and the Vicar that, as a first step towards this consummation, there should be holden in the schoolroom a public *soirée*. This meant the traditional teafight, with the addition of ham sandwiches to the ordinary provisions, and a concert interspersed with readings afterwards. Ethel entered into the scheme with great fervour. The magnates of the immediate locality were impressed — none of them very tremendous people; and Mrs. Hick gave a tray of cake, and Mrs. Hince a ham of her own curing, and Mrs. Warmington, of the Mount, six pounds of tea, and Mrs. Jones a batch of household bread, and somebody else a basket of dairy butter. The ladies who gave gifts had the right to preside at the tables, and when the time came they were gay with festive ribbons and sat above their cates with proprietorial smile. But before the time came Ethel had much to do in rehearsing the choir in partsongs culled from her own little *répertoire* — “Blow, Gentle Gales,” and “Spotted Snakes,” and the like. The rehearsals were held in the school-room, and very pleasant they were with their mixture of fun and formality; but the foundress of the festival had her troubles, and chief among them was the want of a tenor who could take the high A natural without cracking on it. All the young gentlemen of the choir who sang tenor through their noses

could get at it more or less by dint of choking; but she yearned for somebody who would not choke, and in the nick of time he came.

"Miss Donne," said the Vicar one dusky evening, clamping noisily into the schoolroom, and beginning to speak as soon as he had passed the door; "I have brought you a recruit. Allow me to introduce to you Mr. George Banks. Miss Donne, Mr. Banks."

Ethel rose from her seat at the piano to receive him. The light was so dim that she could make out nothing but a tall and well-set figure—Mr. Georg was a volunteer—and a pair of pretty broad shoulders.

"Mr. Banks is a tenor, Miss Donne," said the Vicar, "and I have induced him to promise his assistance at our *soirée*."

"I shall be most happy to be of service, I am sure," said Mr. George Banks in a tenor voice of considerable sweetness. To Ethel's ear the tone had culture and refinement in it, and the speaking voice carried promise. It was softer and lighter than men's voices commonly are, but it was clear and round. The Vicar began to drag a form about the room and to light the gas, and Ethel saw before her a good-looking young fellow, with brown hair, and eyes, a palish complexion, and a fair sweeping moustache, which gave him perhaps a handsomer look than his features deserved. The moustache was silky and long, and

the young man's brown hair was parted in the middle and carefully groomed. He was dressed quietly and in good taste, and bore her scrutiny without embarrassment. Ethel's first view was eminently favourable.

"You have music with you," she said. "Perhaps you will give us a solo at the *soirée*?"

"With very great pleasure," he responded.

"I dare say, now," thought the girl, "that he *can* sing. They generally make such a fuss when they can't." It turned out that Mr. Banks could sing nicely; not so well as he thought, perhaps, but he was pleasant to listen to, and that for an amateur tenor is something. The high A presented no difficulties to him. "You will be a great accession to us, Mr. Banks," said Ethel gratefully. "I am very much obliged to you for coming."

"Not at all," protested Mr. Banks. But walking homeward with Miss Donne, and the Vicar, the artful youth drew out the fact that the lady had a soprano voice, and hinted at the preparation of a duet or two. The Vicar seconded him, and Ethel felt a great desire to sing with somebody who really could sing. That was a pleasure she had never enjoyed; and Mr. Banks and the Vicar were, in brief, invited to the farmhouse, and by its hospitable mistress pressed to take supper. They consented; and whilst the

meal was getting ready, Ethel and the new-comer tried over "The Minute Gun at Sea," and arranged for themselves a tenor and treble rendering of "All's Well." The Vicar was delighted, and his delight took a practical turn.

"Really, Miss Donne," said the Vicar, "we ought to raise the prices."

It transpired at table that Mr. Banks had a four miles' walk before him, and everybody was quite sympathetic with him on that account. He declared that he really didn't mind it, and in fact he set out upon it in evident high good spirits. The young man had finessed for this meeting with some skill, and, hearing of the coming *soirée*, had induced a friend to mention him and his vocal powers to the Vicar, had unobtrusively thrown himself in that good man's way, and procured an easy invitation. He had seen Ethel once by chance a year before, and of set purpose many a time since then, and had longed to speak to her, but had never been able to approach her until now. He could see that he had made a favourable impression to begin with, and he resolved to improve it.

There were more rehearsals before the eventful night came; and Mr. Banks, although much too wary to introduce any other men-singers, who might have turned out unpleasant, brought an ugly old fellow who fluted like an angel, and he threw himself into the musical preparations with

so much ardour that Ethel was charmed with him. He was the most active and obliging young man she had encountered, and the frequency with which he contrived excuses for meeting her did credit to the fertility of his fancy. She found no fault with this, and thought it all natural enough. She took Mr. Banks for a musical enthusiast; and so he was, by a quibble. He was musical after a fashion, and he was enthusiastic—in his admiration of himself and Miss Donne. He could not help thinking what a beautiful couple they would make. The young man's forte was not personal modesty. "Hang it all," he had been known to plead, "I haven't any sympathy with that confounded cant which tells a good-looking fellow that he ought to pretend to be unaware of his own advantages." He broke out thus pretty often upon John Keen, his chum. "I'm not an Adonis, I know." "No," John would answer, "you ain't, old man." "But I should pass in a crowd," Mr. Banks would flow on, silently contemning satire; "and I should be an ass not to know it." John was a long-haired young man, careless of his personal aspect and at feud with society. He made war against convention by smoking in the streets, and by wearing a broad-brimmed felt and his shabbiest coat on Sundays. These habits and an open warfare with the Reverend Jabez Wallier, of Zion, gave John a republican, communistic, free-thinking sort of reputation with the graver seniors of the

town. George Banks and he had been at school together, and were companions still, with next to nothing in common. In an incautious moment Mr. Banks mentioned the approaching *soirée* and its date.

"I'll go to Quarrymoor with you," said John Keen; and George, who could not very well object to this, gave way to it with an ill grace. "You don't mean to say," said John, who had or affected the merest suspicion of the local drawl, "that you're going to get into a claw-hammer coat for this business, do you?" George had been giving elaborate instructions to a Birmingham tailor about a new dress-suit, which must be ready before Thursday.

"I'm not a barbarian," said he, "if you are. Of course I shall dress for it." John had a dry and aggravating slow smile, which looked as if it meant something. It came into play now, and now, as always, affected his companion unpleasantly. "What have you to grin at?" George asked, with some show of temper.

"What has anybody got to grin at on this filthy planet?" asked John; but he smiled, nevertheless, with a look of uncertain humour. George had an uneasy suspicion that his friend was smiling at him.

The evening came, and George appeared resplendent. Anxious as he was to meet Miss Donne, he was careful not to mar the *éclat* of

his advent by too early an arrival, and only turned up when the tables had been cleared and put away and the seats arranged. Most of the natives had never seen a man in evening dress before, and they regarded him with critical wonder. After his first song a burly, red-faced man of genial aspect cried aloud, "Three cheers for the mon i' the shirt-front!" and the ditty was loudly redemanded. George sang again with a readiness which established him as a popular favourite, and when Ethel and he appeared together the enthusiasm was tremendous. It was a great night for Quarrymoor. A local celebrity had written a poem for the occasion.

Good people all, I hope yo'm well,
An' as yo' an' your tay 'll agree;
For my own part, I'n a täal to tell
About this heeur Swarree.

This composition ran into ninety verses, and the bard was so tickled with his own humour that now and again he laughed till the tears ran, and the audience roared with him and at him. He rhymed swarray with "ham and buns and tay;" he rhymed swarri with "summer sky;" and in the last verse he well-nigh killed the Vicar by an evident but unfulfilled intention to make the much-tortured last syllable jingle with "me and you." The majority laughed because the act of laughter is catching, and because the example

was set them by the gentlefolks. Otherwise, they would have sat to see the word more knocked about even than it had been, conscious of a necessity for poetic licence in its handling. The bard was the hit of the evening; and an hour later, when he could trust himself, John Keen congratulated him upon his success. "Well, mister," said the local lion with a sort of proud humility, "it eeat everybody as can write poetry." John went outside and sat upon a tombstone, and gave his heart to mirth.

Meantime, Mr. Banks made large strides in the good graces of Miss Donne. I suppose you would not give much for a story which had no chronicle of love-making. I think it is Agur the son of Jakeh who, in reciting the words of wisdom which his mother taught him, expresses his wonder at "the way of a man with a maid." It was wonderful so long ago, and it is still wonderful. The literature of love-making is beyond computation, and the simple theme still pleases.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT befell that, after the *soirée* at Quarrymoor, Mr. George Banks began to profess an extraordinary interest in matters antiquarian, and to poke about at odd hours in the old church, copying brasses and making sketches of a marble lord of

the manor who lay on his back in a neglected corner of the building. John Keen, his chum, had a sort of double-barrelled profession, being both solicitor and mine surveyor; but his natural tastes were towards architecture, and it was to him that George was indebted for his new pursuit. John, having seen Ethel, followed George's example and fell in love with her. It came quite naturally to *him* to haunt the old church in the hope of seeing her, and George learned the lesson and availed himself of it. So the two young men used to dodge each other in a rather guilty way on leisure afternoons, and once or twice, with mutual ire and astonishment, met at the church.

I have already told you that George Bushell had inherited his brother Joseph's fortune. He throve mightily, and became a local magnate, signing himself J.P. and being much looked up to. He was a member of the Conservative Central Committee for the county, and had embarked in great mining speculations, and was in these days a staunch Churchman. In affairs ecclesiastical, political, and commercial he came into contact with the best sort of people, and was highly respected. If his money had betrayed him into any pretence of fashion, he would no doubt have been laughed at; but he behaved with much reticence and modesty, and people naturally spoke well of him. No repentances troubled him, and young Joe, his ill-starred nephew, had faded out

of memory years ago. Amongst other enterprises of his, he had bought shares in a local bank, and had bought so largely that he might almost be said to have been the bank's proprietor. He held mines under all sorts of business conditions, and he employed some twenty or thirty clerks at his offices. These, like everybody else in his pay, worked under his own supervision; and amongst them, and high in favour, was George Banks, who, of course, had he only known it, was George Bushell, and legal owner of the desk he sat at, the ledger he made entries in, and the vast estate upon which he was employed. Old Daniel, George's supposed father, had plenty of money, but he would not have the lad trained in idleness. The Saracen was but a little part of the old man's belongings, and George, being acknowledged heir to everything, was lordly with his fellow-clerks and flush of pocket-money. His financial position went with other things to make him a favourite with his employer, and he had freedoms and advantages which his compeers envied.

On the Saturday afternoon which followed the Quarrymoor entertainment, George called upon his employer. Mr. Bushell, intensely respectable to begin with, had by this time grown imposing in appearance. He wore the high collars and the large stock of twenty years' earlier date, and his hair was silvery. His hands, though large with early labour, had grown soft and plump and white;

and his black broadcloth dress, if staid and old-fashioned, was of the best material and cut. He affected some homelinesses of custom, and amongst them he preserved the habit of smoking a long churchwarden clay. This one practice was of considerable value to him, for it lent him a certain patriarchal and unaffected look, and green-horns said that it showed simplicity of character. The Wrongful Heir sat in dull dignity, and the Rightful Heir smirked before him with propitiatory smile.

"I have called, sir," said the favoured clerk with suavity, "to ask a favour. My father's affairs are growing a little too heavy for his hands, and he himself is getting old, sir, as you know. If you could spare me upon an occasional Wednesday afternoon, I could be of more service to him than I am at present."

"Mr. Banks," said the usurper, "no man can serve two masters." Mr. Bushell was familiar with many texts out of Scripture, and most of the passages which stuck in his memory appeared to make for his advantage, so that he regarded the sacred volume with respect, as a storehouse of useful aphorism. But the clerk knew his way with him.

"I am sure, sir," he answered, "that I am fully sensible of the favour I ask, and of course I know that it is not business-like. But I should be most happy if you would allow me to make

up the deficiency I propose to create on other evenings. My father is jealous about entrusting his business to other hands, and his affairs are becoming considerable."

Mr. Bushell, being well-to-do himself, naturally liked to have well-to-do people about him. He abhorred poverty. It wanted to borrow, which was bad; or to beg, which was worse; and it made itself disagreeable in many ways. It presented facilities for being ground down, which could not be looked for in people in prosperous circumstances; but this mere amelioration left the main evils of it unchecked.

"I'll think about it, Mr. Banks," said the usurper; and the Rightful Heir, having bowed and smirked himself away, walked to Quarrymoor attired in festal raiment. Three miles out he overtook John Keen, and on first sighting him was disposed to drop behind; but so slight a matter as the direction of the summer wind made that inconvenient. For John was lighting a pipe, and, in turning his back upon the wind to do it, he faced George. The young men met with a confused attempt at indifferent good-fellowship, and of course each thought the other abominably in the way.

"Lovely weather, isn't it?" said George.

"Admirable," said John. There was a dry, aggravating air of self-possession about this young man, even when he was least self-possessed. He

said little at most times, but he always gave George an impression that he was thinking with cutting smartness. In point of fact John inspired a feeling of something very like terror in George's mind.

"Where are *you* off to?" asked George with a great effort.

"I am going to make some sketches in Quarrymoor Church," John answered. "There are some stunning brasses there, too, and the pulpit's very interesting." George sketched a little in a mechanical South Kensington manner, and had wasted the evenings of a year or two of his life at the Birmingham Art School; but he scarcely knew whether his companion was chaffing him or not. Ethel practised on the organ on Saturday afternoons, and George was bound to the church to listen to her, and a guilty conscience needs no accuser. This talk about an interesting pulpit sounded like satire under the circumstances; but George controlled himself, and said simply:—

"I'll come with you, if you don't mind."

"Very glad, I am sure," John responded hypocritically; and they went on in mutual distrust of each other. "This dandified duffer," thought John to himself, "can't be sneaking after Miss Donne, can he? She's worth a million of him." George, on the other hand, felt a sort of right over the young lady, and, like a lover, was ready to be jealous. Of course he acknowledged that

his rights were as yet exceedingly vague; but they were there somehow, and he wasn't going to have that fellow Keen trampling on them.

Quarrymoor Church had a squat Norman tower of great antiquity, and its lines were too ugly to be made pleasant even by its clustering mosses and ivy. Yet it was pleasing to the eyes of these young men when once their ears had assured them that the shrine held their own divinity. Ethel was in the organ loft, improvising on the wheezy organ, unconscious of listeners. And if she had dreams which were not altogether in character with the place, I, for one, am not disposed to be very hard upon her. She was thinking of a young man with broad shoulders and a tenor voice, and the voice spoke to her even in the broken-winded, asthmatic music of the old organ. It was dusky up there, though the sun blazed hot and bright outside; and in the cool dimness of the place Ethel saw the eyes of the tenor-voiced young man, and thought them very tender and honest. In truth, their brown inclined a trifle too much to green, and they were something too near together, and had to the observant physiognomist a furtive and even frightened look. The rivals stole into the church on tiptoe, and John began to sketch the recumbent lord of the manor, George making a pretence of watching him; and both of them yearned a little over the wheezy voluntary,

which, after all, was played by Love's own hands. They said not a word to each other for an hour, and just as the sketch was finished they heard Ethel closing the organ. Then a ridiculous tremor fell upon them, and the girl, coming in sight of them unexpectedly, shared it to the full; but, showing nothing of it, advanced and shook hands with both, and, leading the way to the porch, covered her own confusion by examining the drawing there to John's satisfaction and George's enrage-ment. But Mr. Banks was too good a diplomatist to display his anger openly, and explained suavely how his visit to the church was entirely due to Mr. Keen's artistic enthusiasm, how he was taking a walk and fell in with Mr. Keen, how Mr. Keen was going sketching, how he availed himself of that opportunity to take a closer look at the antiquities of which the Vicar had spoken, and how delighted he had been to listen to Miss Donne's playing.

"The poor old organ," said Miss Donne, "is in a sad condition."

"Worst instrument I ever heard," said clumsy downright John. Ethel was hurt at this. You may pity an old friend broken by time and asthma, but you do not care to hear anybody speak bitterly of his infirmities. George had more tact, and caught exactly the right tone of half-affectionate regret.

"I dare say," said he, "that you won't like

the new organ half so well as this." Ethel looked at him almost with gratitude.

"How well he understands one!" she thought. "O!" she said aloud, unwilling to be thought sentimental, "it won't have the associations at first, but of course it will be a much finer instrument."

"I beg your pardon," said John, "for pitching into the old organ. I forgot that it was a friend of yours. That makes every difference." Ethel smiled at this, and John continued. "I've a queer old square box of a piano that I learned to play on. I can't have it tuned because the wires would pull it off its legs if I did, and all the chords are loose. I like it, somehow, though."

"That is precisely how I feel about the organ," said Ethel, readily forgiving him.

"Confound the fellow!" said George to himself. "*He's* getting sentimental now!"

Miss Donne did not ask the young men to enter the farmhouse, but bade them good-bye at the gate, and they walked home together in rather an ill-humoured way. George betook himself to the Dudley Arms and sought the delights of a shilling pool an hour or two earlier than usual, and, being out of temper, played badly; and, playing badly, lost; and, losing, strove to recoup himself by bets. Losing in that direction also, he went home in a very savage condition, disposed to quarrel with anybody. Old Daniel, who closed

his house at eleven o'clock, had gone to bed an hour ago; but Dinah was sitting up for her son, and on his entry she saw that he was sullen and out of temper. Indeed, George's tenor voice did not often make home musical.

"I've laid out a nice bit o' supper for you, George," said Dinah, quaking a little, but affecting not to see the lowering look upon his face.

"*I* don't want any supper," said George, throwing himself moodily into an armchair, and diving both hands deep into his pockets.

"Won't you eat a bit, my dear?" asked Dinah.

"No," said George, with undignified mockery; "I won't eat a bit, my dear. Who the deuce asked *you* to sit up for me?"

Dinah returned no answer; and the young man, whose sulks were always a little young-womanish, felt a feminine sense of spite at her quietude. It angered him more than any retort would have done.

"Confound it!" he broke out, his tenor voice sounding in its petulance quite shrill and querulous, "can't you leave a man alone? Sitting up to watch what time of night I come in, and spying on me when I go out! You can go to bed now, anyway."

"Yes, dear," said Dinah submissively, "I will. But I wish you'd eat a bit."

"Well, then," snapped Miss Donne's lover,

"you'll have your wish for your trouble. Go to bed."

The last straw breaks the camel's back, but, before that consummation can be arrived at, a good many straws must have been heaped up. Dinah's womanly patience had endured for four-and-twenty years, and through all that dreary time she had kept her secret. She had often so yearned to tell it to her son, that her whole soul had seemed to ache with the effort of repression, and every fibre of her body had thrilled with unsatisfied longing. But she had never been so near to the actual revelation as she was now. Human affection, like everything else in the world, is intermittent, and has its ebbs and flows. The tide of motherly longing and unsatisfied desire of love had been running high all day in Dinah's heart. She did not cry easily; women who have endured real and lasting sorrows rarely do, for tears have a knack of wearing out their channel when they run too freely. But at George's last rebuff the water sprang to her eyes with a bitter little pang of actual physical pain, and with glistening eyes she laid a timid hand upon his shoulder.

"I wish you'd be a bit kinder with me, George," she said.

"Then, why the dickens don't you let a man alone?" responded the injured George.

The urgent affection in the mother's heart overflowed all bounds but one. She put her arms

about her son's neck, and laid her cheek against his.

"You don't know how I love you, my darling," she said; "do give me a little bit o' love back again, won't you?"

"Oh, be hanged!" said George.

Dinah withdrew her hands and stood up as if he had struck her. There was at least this one poor excuse for the son of the errant Joe, that he had no knowledge of the real relationship between Dinah and himself. Perhaps one other excuse he had may be reckoned a little more cogent. He was a cad through and through, and, being what he was, had no capacity for the understanding of any unselfish love; and, wanting that capacity, could scarcely guess his own power to wound. Let the student of human nature be honest, and strive to do justice to everybody. How far a cad is answerable for being a cad is a subtle and perplexing question. Only a fool would break a half-gallon jug for not holding a gallon.

"Why don't you get married?" said George; "you've had chances enough. There's that fellow Hince has asked you three times already, and he's always hanging about the house now."

Dinah stood silent. Mr. Hince was a butcher, of prosperous circumstances and more than middle age, and a second time widowed. Some time before the death of his second wife this gentleman had expressed his intention of making Dinah Mrs.

Hence the third. So far as so gentle and affectionate a creature was able to hate anybody, Dinah hated the prosperous butcher.

"Why don't you marry him?" said George, newly aggrieved by the withdrawal of the caress which had offended him and by her silence; "you'd better. I don't want to have you on my hands all my life long."

"Good-night, George," said Dinah.

George was too surly to answer even so small an overture of peace as this. But the last word was precious to him, and he responded, "Just you remember that!"

"Good night," said Dinah meekly once more.

"Just you remember that!" her son repeated, and she withdrew to her own room.

This, and many a like scene which had gone before it, seemed to her self-accusing mind the fit and proper punishment of the deceit she had practised so many years ago. She was not clever enough to formulate it to herself; but she thought all punishment the natural outgrowth of crime, and her own girlish yielding to her lover's impetuous demands for a secret marriage had long since assumed criminal dimensions in her eyes. Dinah being thus summarily and triumphantly disposed of, it occurred to George that he did want his supper after all, and he sat down to the dish she had provided, and cleared it with a gusto rather increased than otherwise by the memory of the

rebuff he had administered. As almost anybody who ever beguiled an evening by the consumption of alcoholic liquors knows, there is a midnight appetite which makes food singularly enjoyable, and George enjoyed his supper. He drank a glass or two of whisky after it, and went to bed, arising late in the morning to breakfast on brandy and soda. Being blessed with a good constitution to begin with, he freshened up on this unsubstantial diet, and, after a stroll, returned to the homely midday Sunday dinner, and played a decent knife and fork there. An hour after dinner, carefully groomed and dressed in excellent taste, he walked to Quarrymoor, and, encountering Ethel in the fields, greeted her in his best manner with a winning smile. The tenor voice was pleasant in the girl's ears, and she had no guess as to how querulous it might be. In the hours of courtship young people, for the most part, see only the best side of each other. I will not do Ethel the injustice to say that she had but one side to show; but at this time, as nearly always, the best side declared itself naturally and without effort. She thought very highly of her companion, and though not yet in love with him, she walked with a certain tremulous gaiety towards the boundaries of love's demesne, not altogether unconscious of the direction in which her steps were tending.

George himself, as becomes the male animal under such circumstances, had more pronounced

and decided views with regard to his own intentions. When a man is young, he can fall in love with a pretty woman after a fashion, without developing any particular nobilities of sentiment. George was not uncultured. His taste in poetry was not the highest; but he had read a certain quantity of British verse, and knew, or thought he knew, the sentiments which were proper to entertain under the circumstances. The beauties of nature, for instance, came into his scheme of things, and he invited Miss Donne to listen to the strains of a skylark which made double holiday in the Sunday air, freer of smoke-wreaths than common. He stood with her upon the wooden bridge that crossed a small bickering stream, and asked her to guess in what key its murmured music ran. This enquire quite charmed Ethel, seeming to indicate a love at once for nature and for art. When a young woman is disposed to think well of you, you need not be very clever for her to think you clever, or a pattern of sweet temper for her to think you amiable. There are not many things more pathetic than the trustful willingness of almost any girl to be led into a false estimate of character under such conditions. Titania can fall in love with Bottom the weaver, and give Oberon and Puck no pains to plot against her. She is happy if she wakes from her dream before the golden circle has bound the ass-headed clown and the fairy queen irrevocably together.

Love is an idolater, worshipping the poorest idol with the completest faith, gilding the base earth of which the image is compact until it looks like gold and taking it for gold. And the worst of it is that no wit or worth or wisdom can save any man or woman from this amazing folly. To have a statue of all imaginable excellences set up in your holy of holies, and to be afraid to scratch lest you should find the clay below the gilding! To have the ungilded original entering that sacred place and smashing the statue!

Perhaps, when she went into the fields that afternoon, Ethel was not altogether free of fancy that the young gentleman with the tenor voice and the brown eyes might, by good fortune, meet her. It is certain that when she encountered him the air had suddenly grown sunnier, and the quiet landscape brighter. She had offered George no hospitality on the previous day, not caring probably to make John Keen free of the farmhouse parlour; but when, after a long-drawn stroll, George offered to say "Good-bye" at the gate, she asked him in, and he, without even a pretence of polite reluctance, accepted her invitation.

"Mother," said Ethel, "you remember Mr. Banks?"

Of course the old lady remembered him well, and he was received with much cordiality. There was something so particular in her mother's manner, though George did not see it, and was

not intended to see it, that the 'girl blushed two or three times as the three sat together at the tea-table. George found himself, so to speak, in clover. The juicy, home-made bread, the firm, pale-golden butter, the fragrant tea, were each and all pleasant in their way. The young lady's manner was everything that could be hoped for; the mother was courteous, and evidently pleased to see him; and he was enough in love with Ethel to find even her unassisted presence charming.

Tea being over, they had a little sacred music before church, and after the sacred music they walked to the ugly old Norman edifice together. After church two or three of the neighbours dropped in, and they had a little more sacred music, Mr. Banks being the central figure of the evening. Then came supper, and, by something like common consent, a seat was found for him next to Ethel's, and in the virgin's innocent heart arose and radiated those little electric flashes which begin with nearness when love begins. This Sunday evening was the precursor of many similarly spent; and George, in a tacit way, became recognised by the neighbourhood as Miss Donne's suitor.

On the Monday following this particular Sunday the Wrongful Heir turned up at his office.

"I've been thinkin', Mr. Banks, about what you asked me o' Saturday," said he. "You can

have your Wednesday afternoons, seein' as you want to attend to your father's business, and I shall expect you to give me an extra hour or two on Monday nights, private, at my own house. Will that suit you?"

The Rightful Heir, with ingratiatory smile, became fluent in acknowledgment. The arrangement would suit him admirably. It was understood that the said arrangement should be and remain in force until further orders. But I regret to say that old Daniel's business received no profit from it, for the holiday was invariably employed in a visit to Quarrymoor. The arrangement for Monday evening brought Rightful Heir and Wrongful Heir more close together than they had ever been before, and George got to know a good deal about his employer's private concerns. He could guess, with a fair approach to accuracy, how much the old man was worth; and he knew, with tolerable exactness, in what directions his money was invested. Old George found him very smart and apt, and felt himself relieved of much labour by the new arrangement. It was not in his nature to trust anybody very far; but he gave young George more of his confidence than he had ever given elsewhere, and the young man repaid him by a sleek and well-conditioned assiduity. Almost any sort of human arrangement is liable to grow out of its original bounds, and Mr. Banks in course of a month or two was not in the least

surprised to find himself translated from his stool in the office to the chair of private secretary in Mr. Bushell's own house. This brought with it an increase of salary and an increase of freedom, and George began to make a considerable figure in the town. It was generally said that old Bushell, who had not a single creature belonging to him, might not improbably leave at least a slice of his vast fortune to young Banks. This kind of rumour is apt, in little country places, to bring about results more or less practical, and George's tenor voice was heard in drawing-rooms whose occupants were quite outside the Saracen's homely sphere.

The summer had gone, and the harvest was over and ended. The fields at Quarrymoor Farm, lately thick with waving wheat and barley, looked threadbare and waste. Here and there a meagre covey rose from the stubble when a chance foot-step crossed the lonelier fields. The trees were slowly firing towards the flush of beauty which heralds winter and their own bereavement. Love's little idyll had, of course, been writing itself out all this time line by line, and Ethel had learned many things. Mr. Banks had not yet formally proposed; but he had been very near it once or twice, and Ethel was quite content to wait, and to leave unspoiled that delicious maiden uncertainty which yet was certain. Love is a rare epicure.

Whilst George's tenor voice had been growing

sweeter and sweeter for Ethel's ears, and she had been translating into him all the charm of her own nature, and, with no egotism, worshipping her own heart's reflection, John Keen had been walking in the same path with George. There was an uneasy sense between the old companions that war was coming, and, although the rivalry between them had never been openly declared as yet, it was none the less recognised. It broke out at last in an unexpected way. John's chronic war with the Reverend Jabez Wallier, of Zion, had reached an acute stage, and the young sinner had written rhymes about the parson. The Reverend Jabez had carried the war back into the enemy's country, and had published a pamphlet in which he had pointedly set forth his belief that John had the sign of the beast in his forehead. The young man's sense of humour being tickled, wrote further verses, which to the Reverend Jabez really represented themselves as being the very versified voice of the pit. Even the average churchgoers were shocked; and John, to his own distaste, found himself on a sudden the hero of that section of the town he liked least of all. The Vicar of Quarrymoor loved a joke and hated a Dissenter, and, one or two copies of John's verses having fallen into his hands, he disseminated them, with less judgment than might have been expected of him. Somehow, the knowledge of this pouring forth of John's muse got to Ethel's

ears, and she was alarmed for George. That sweet-minded young man was orthodox and had no sense of humour; and one can readily imagine the dread an innocent girl might feel, lest a free-thinking firebrand of a fellow, who could publicly chaff a preacher, should communicate his baleful fires to her sweetheart. She warned George against him.

"He is an old and valued friend of mine," said that good creature. He was very glad of a chance to throw John over and be rid of him; but if he did it for Ethel's sake, it would be something in his own favour. "And I have not read the verses. It would be unjust to condemn him without a trial."

That was obviously fair, and Ethel admitted it. She was a little afraid of John, apart from theological questions; for he came courting in a dogged manner, praising her to her face without disguise, and blurting out his admiration with a resolved shamefacedness which was hard to bear.

"I don't ask you to leave him unkindly," said Ethel; and added, with blushing haste, "I have no right to ask you anything—but—"

"You have a right to ask me anything," said George, who was always in these days hovering on the brink of an actual declaration, and always shrinking back again. "I will read the verses, and if I find them as bad

as they have been represented, I shall not hesitate."

There the question dropped; but when the rivals, successful and unsuccessful, next encountered each other, George opened fire upon his old companion. Whatever a man does, it is worth while to do it thoroughly; and George, being for the moment orthodox, surprised himself by the religious fervour of his own feelings. The interview took place in the street. John, with his shocking bad hat on the back of his head and his pipe in his mouth, lounged on to meet his rival, who was cap-à-pie in the latest devices of male fashion.

"I've been waiting for an opportunity to speak to you," said George, with such a sensation as a man might feel if some important part of him were dissolving inside. True courage, it may be argued, consists in the facing of one's own fears. A man may behave with magnificent pluck though he *wants* to run away all the time.

"Ah!" said John, suspicious of the truth.

"I hope," said George, "that you will be able to deny the authorship of those black-guard verses addressed to Mr. Wallier." The versifier looked at him and gave him time to go on. "They are attributed to you," George added uncomfortably.

"Have you read 'em?" enquired the versifier.

"I regret to say I have," responded George. If you examine this response with verbal subtlety, you will discover that it was not a lie. There was something in his rival's manner which gave the versifier an inkling of the truth.

"Never mind what you regret," said John. "Have you read 'em?"

"Yes," said George, lying this time plump and clean, though against his conscience. "Did you write them?"

"Hit Jabez where he lived, didn't they?" asked John elliptically. "Yes, yes. I wrote 'em. What about 'em?"

"I regret," said George, almost startled to notice how much his pious anger helped him, "to learn that the popular accusation is based on truth. You will see that, after this, it is not very likely that we can know each other."

"Clearly," said John; and, dull as he was, the other felt the satire.

"Good-day," said George stiffly.

"Wait a bit," said Keen; and for a second or two the young men faced each other in silence. "Before we part, I've a word to say." There was another pause. "No, I won't say it now, because I mean it, and after what has happened you'd misunderstand me."

"If you have anything to say," said George,

"pray say it now. I shall certainly be unwilling to offer you another opportunity."

"Very well," said John, with the air of one who is too tired to be scornful. "You and I know why we part."

"We part," said George, "because of your indecent violation of things which I have been taught to consider sacred. I'm not a saint"—John nodded with his customary dry smile—"but there are some things I can't stand, and—"

"J. K. at Quarrymoor is one of 'em," said J. K. quietly. "We both know."

"I am at loss to understand you," returned George.

"Are you?" the other asked. "I'm very glad of it, because it simplifies matters. We have but one quarrel, and only the *odium theologicum* divides us."

"Let me know at once what you have to say," demanded George with some asperity.

"I'll say nothing worse than good-bye," John answered; and the old companions parted. The condemned satirist pulled his shocking bad hat from the back of his head low upon his brows, and walked on.

"She'll marry that fellow," he mused sadly and bitterly. "It would have been of no use to warn him at any time, I suppose, and we should only have quarrelled outright if I had warned him now. I wonder if she had heard of me and the

Reverend Jabez? Might have frightened her. I don't care much about public opinion, but I don't want her to think ill of me. Pooh! What does it matter what she thinks of me? If she can only think well of him!—that's enough for me to pray for." The young man went on until he came to the front of the Dudley Arms, and there somebody rounding the corner suddenly ran against him. It turned out to be the Reverend Jabez, who, without apology, hurried on his way. "I beg your pardon, sir!" cried John with a smile as the parson scuttled along the High Street; but before the verse-writer had turned again the smile had faded, and he walked on with a melancholy countenance and a heavy heart. No man of five-and-twenty can endure with equanimity to be crossed in love. And least of all can any young gentleman endure to be thrown away for a rival whom he knows to be unworthy.

CHAPTER IX.

GEORGE BANKS seems inclined, up to now, to turn out badly, as young gentlemen with the sweetest of tenor voices, the silkiest of moustaches, and the suavest manners, have unhappily done before him. The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table speaks of a Thomas who includes three Thomases

—the Thomas you know, the Thomas Thomas knows, and the Thomas God made. All men have their various sides, but the width of difference which can lie between a good woman's apprehension of her lover and the man's real nature is rarely equalled elsewhere. To Ethel, George was a hero; and when, after no more than a six months' courtship, he asked her to marry him, she consented, and thought herself the happiest and most honoured of women. There is probably a strong family likeness between one proposal of marriage and another, and it seems likely that there is no equally important movement made in life in which men's idiosyncrasies assert themselves less freely.

There had been great efforts made to fit up the new organ at Quarrymoor Church in time for the Christmas festival, and, the important work being finished, Ethel, one evening a fortnight before the sacred day, sent round a shock-headed farm boy to the bellows, drew out the stops, laid her hands upon the keys, and for the first time heard the new voice speak to her. It was quite an event in her life, and a score of the people amongst whom her simple days had been spent were there to share the pleasure of it. There had been finer organs built than this; but eloquence dwells in the heart of the hearer rather than in the voice of the speaker, and Miss Donne had a sort of right of ownership in the new instrument, and, though

a more than commonly good musician, would have been charmed with one much poorer. As the music woke from the great square chest in which until now it had slumbered, it was like the awakening of a soul to life. And as the new soul, with wide-spread, slow-sounding majestic pinions, fanned its way towards heaven, the player's seemed to follow it, and to hover, clothed in sweetness, high above this mere earth, and its little cares and griefs and unheroic joys. But she had been no lover if George's soul had not seemed to hover side by side with hers, borne up by the storm-wind of the music. George was not in the organ-loft, though he had begged hard to be allowed to accompany her there. Nobody likes to be seen at a disadvantage. St. Cecilia seated before the organ-pipes with an angel looking at her makes a pretty picture, but the lady probably played in her own primitive days without the use of pedals. There is a good deal of ungraceful labour in playing an organ, and Ethel knew it, and gave George the benefit of her knowledge, compelling him to sit with the rest in the body of the church. Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast, to soften rocks and rend the knotted oak. George Banks was an emotional person, with some knowledge of music and a considerable liking for it, and, over and beyond this, he was in love. He could lie upon occasion, and he could be ungenerous and ungracious with anybody who

was too weak to punish him; but these faculties are not incompatible with the existence of the power to compass emotional pleasures. His soul also, or what passed for it, took an owl's flight after the dove-flight of Ethel's and the eagle-soaring of the music, and his love mixed with the organ tones and they with it, until his greenish-brown eyes were glistening with easy tears. He had time to be proud of this manifestation of a cultured and impressible nature before the music ceased, and was sorry that Ethel was not there to see the artistic moisture in his eyes. When she came down he told her of it, and praised the beauty of her playing. They walked home together, and nobody was stupid enough to try to come between them, or to distract the attention of either of the lovers from the other.

Anything was welcome at Quarrymoor Farm which gave an occasion for hospitality; and, as a matter of course, this trial of the new organ presented a capital opportunity. The maids had set out a supper-table in the old-fashioned parlour—a noble piece of beef, a juicy ham, home-bred and home-cured, a saddle of mutton: all cold, but flanked by steaming dishes of hot potatoes, and supported by vast loaves of home-baked bread on trenchers, and foaming jugs of home-brewed ale. A meal for hungry people, on a night when the keen air made even lovers sharp-set in appetite. Uncle Borge was there, a wizened man in black;

and Aunt Borge, a fat lady in blue, who sat down to supper in her bonnet, as a hint that her society might be looked for no longer than the meal should last. The Vicar was there, radiant; and Mr. Hick, the miller, an ardent politician; and Mrs. Hick, the miller's wife. In all, a dozen people sat down to that generous board; Ethel and George being side by side as usual.

"Now, Mr. Hick," said Uncle Borge, "what do you think about this here Conservative re-haction?"

"Why," returned the miller, "I think as it's of a piece wi' well (well nigh) everythin'."

"Ah!" said Mr. Borge. "Do you, now?"

"Why, I remember," said Mr. Hick, "when the bread riots was on i' Bilston, when the flour was that bad as the bread 'ud run o' th' ovens. The Toery party was i' power i' them days."

"Was 'em?" asked Uncle Borge; "an' wheer was De Isreeayly then?"

"Well," said the miller, "I don't rightly know as he'd come up; not a lot."

"No?" said Uncle Borge.

"He was somewheer about, I mek no doubt," said Mr. Hick. "Thee may'st bet thy head he was up to summat even i' them days."

"Ah, to be sure!" said Uncle Borge, with the air of a man convinced by abstruse argument. A second supply of beef for Mr. Hick and of mutton for Uncle Borge arriving simultaneously,

the discussion was allowed to slumber. The miller welcomed this diversion, not being so sure of the company as he would have been at the King's Arms at Quarrymoor. The Vicar daunted him a little.

"Now, Miss Donne," said Mr. Hick, raising his glass in the next pause, "I mightn't see thee again not afore Christmas; an' so, here's a merry Christmas an' a happy New Year to thee an' thine. Mrs. Donne, ma'am, I drink to you. My respects to *you*, sir," to the Vicar; "Missis," to Mrs. Hick, "my opinion on you."

"James 'll allays tek a chance for a merry word," said Mrs. Hick, apologetically, to the Vicar.

"And why not?" asked the Vicar. "Mr. Hick, I follow your example, and drink to the general health of the whole table. Ladies and gentlemen, a merry Christmas and a happy New Year." Everybody sipped in answer to this sentiment, and George, glass in hand, murmured in Ethel's ear—

"A happy New Year, Miss Donne."

Ethel turned and answered, "A happy New Year."

She had caught his tone of voice, as pathetic people often do, and she half-whispered the words, with a smile. He ventured on what he had never done before, and, first touching her hand beneath the table and finding it unwithdrawn, he clasped it in his own. She made a faint, a very

faint, effort to remove it; and, he resisting ever so slightly, she let it rest for a brief second or two. After that she sate in a pleasant confusion, whilst Uncle Borge and Mr. Hick talked about the "staät o' traäd" and kindred matters.

"Our Borge," said the stout lady in blue, "'ud sit an' talk all night if a body'd let him." Thin Uncle Borge took this as a signal to be gone, and arose in obedience to it. The other guests followed his example, but George dared to linger. Ethel had thrown a shawl about her head and had run out to the gate to repeat her wishes for a merry Christmas. The friendly voices burthened with the local drawl came back, borne down the snow-covered lane on the clear air with a genial crispness in the tone, when George emerged in his great-coat from the house and intercepted Miss Donne's return. Perhaps Miss Donne was willing to have her return intercepted—perhaps she had even run out of doors for a purpose of her own. How would the clumsy male creature make chances for the utterance of his sentiments in this sort of case unless he were assisted?

"You'll wish me a merry Christmas, won't you, Miss Donne?" asked George.

"Yes," said Ethel, "a merry Christmas."

"And a happy New Year?" the young man asked.

"I shall see you again before the New Year," she answered.

"Won't you wish me a happy New Year?" he asked again. "Won't you *give* me a happy New Year?—the happiest new year I ever had in my life?" Ethel murmured an inaudible something—she herself scarcely knew what. But she knew that by this time she was in George's arms, and that he was working with the fingers of one hand to free her face from the shawl which obscured it. When he had achieved that object he kissed her, and the tenor voice murmured at her ear, telling how long George had loved her and how dearly, and how it should be the one effort of his life to make her happy, and calling her his angel and his darling. It is quite a commonplace sort of matter to write about or to read about in a novel, and George did it all in the orthodox manner; but it is curious to notice how fresh it is when one meets with it outside books. With George it was perhaps more a matter of the youth of blood than a matter of the affections; but, as I have said already, some people do not find nobility of sentiment a necessary appurtenance to love, and he was at least more in earnest than he had ever been before, and meant all he said; and could not, indeed, find words to say a hundredth part enough. Ethel had no need of any words of her own just then. She could let her lover speak for both, and his words were sweeter

than sweet. But at last—and the whole thing lasted scarcely more than a minute—George felt his kisses answered once, only once, and she was gone. He went homewards triumphing; and, what with his triumph and the clear exhilarating air, he felt so full of life and gladness that he must needs run at full speed every now and again, so that the four miles between himself and home were covered in forty minutes, and he reached the Saracen bright and flushed, and looking for once in his life downright handsome. He greeted Dinah good-humouredly when he met her in one of the passages, and, pushing by, reached the little snuggerly—so unchanged, during this four-and-twenty years, that a picture of it drawn in the old days would still answer for it almost to a bottle—and there found Daniel scorching his thin legs before a rousing fire, and with fat white hands feebly encouraging his digestive organs, as on the night when we first saw him.

“Father,” said the young man, throwing off his overcoat and turning his face away a little, “I’ve news for you. I am engaged to be married.”

“Ah!” said the old man quietly. “Can the young woman keep thee?”

“I hope to be able to keep the young lady,” George answered in affront.

“Engaäged to be married, beest thee?” asked

Daniel. "It's a bit sudden-like, ain't it, George lad? Who is it? Maid or widder?"

"The lady is Miss Ethel Donne, of Quarry-moor Farm," George answered.

"I thought as theer was summat a-tekin' thee out to Quarrymoor," chuckled Daniel with an asthmatic wheeze. "Donne? I knowin' the naäm, I thinkin'. Ah! John Donne, he was a farmer out theer. Is her a daughter of hisn?"

"Yes," said George; "Miss Donne lives at the farm. She is an only child."

"I reckon her'll be pretty warm, then?" said Daniel.

"Her mother has only a life-interest," said George complacently. "The farm is a freehold of more than three hundred acres, and she will have other property besides."

"Very well, then," said Daniel, with another asthmatic chuckle, "I'm ready to dance at the weddin'. I should like to live to nuss a grand-child o' mine, though I don't reckon on it. I'm a-gettin' to be very old, George. I'm a-gettin' main old. I'm three years i' front o' Jim Bonser, and they say as he's a-dyin'. Well, well, well! Tell Diner I want her."

"Dinah," said George, "your father wants you."

"What is it, father?" asked Dinah, entering quietly.

"Your brother George is engaäged to be married," said Daniel; "what d'ye think o' that?"

Here, as always, Dinah's secret stared her in the face. If she could but have claimed George for her child, and have given him a mother's sympathy and a mother's congratulations!

"Who is it, George?" she asked tenderly. He answered more kindly than he had spoken to her for years.

"Miss Donne, at Quarrymoor."

"The young lady who plays the organ at church?" cried Dinah. "Why, George, she's the prettiest gell in all this part o' the country."

"Isn't she?" said George.

"And such a good gell, too, from all I hear," said motherly Dinah. "Why, my dear, you *are* fortunate!"

"When be *you* agoin' off the hooks, Diner?" cried old Daniel. "I'm afeard, my gell, as you've overstayed your market."

"Yes, father," said poor Dinah, "I've overstayed the market."

"There's no pleasin' some folks," said her father. "You've had chance enough; but you've never seemed to tek a likin' to none on 'em, 'cept p'raps as it was young Joe Bushell, an' he's been dead, I count, these 'ears and 'ears."

Dinah had never even heard the errant Joe's name since her mother's death, ten years ago and more. You may guess what a wound the ignorant

words made. But she was used to endurance, and she gave no sign.

"If you'd ha' struck up wi' young Joe," said Daniel, "you'd ha' been main rich now. An' I shouldn't ha' sent you to bed wi' your husband naked, if you had ha' married. Joe'd ha' had everythin' as George's master's got, an' at one time I thought you'd mek a match on it."

What a very patent secret the two young people's love-making must have been, after all!

Dinah kissed George, and congratulated him with all her heart. The young man for once accepted her caresses, and she went to bed almost happy, but full of such thoughts as you may fancy. George himself was too excited to sleep for some two or three hours after getting into bed, and lay tumbling in a way which, under the circumstances, might seem unnatural; but George had a variety of subjects to think about, and the cross-winds and cross-currents of thought tossed the mental barque about rather wildly. For one thing, he was of course going to reform; for, in spite of the airs he had taken with his old companion, he could not lie alone in the darkness of the night thinking of Ethel, and fail to acknowledge that some small reforms in him were needed. To a conscience not over-tender, shilling pool may seem a sufficiently harmless entertainment, but one of George's vows was against its seductions. It was easy, by the aid of a little small betting,

to lose a pound or two in an evening even at shilling pool; and when a man of limited income tests his resources in that way five evenings out of six, he bids fair to get into trouble. In fact, George had borrowed a good bit of money, say a hundred pounds, over and above the "debts of honour"; and though old Daniel was well-to-do, George was not too sure of getting money from him except by a method which, in the light of his own connection with Miss Donne, seemed unworthy of him. An only son ought, of course, to be welcome to take from a well-to-do father a share of what will one day be his own, and the young man had acted upon this principle with some freedom in bygone small emergencies. There are some things a man *must* take a bold face with, if he desire to have his own way and live in peace; and conscience is one of them. George had been apt to deride the utterances of his inward monitor, accusing it of cant and oversusceptibility; but somehow the accusations seemed at this time to stick in his throat, and Ethel presided in a new court of conscience, and gave ruling against him on a hundred matters in which he had been apt to rule in his own favour. Well, he was going to be a new man and start afresh. It was unfair and injurious that, under the circumstances, he could not wipe the slate clean of the old record. His troubles were small enough. He was going to marry a wealthy wife,

and would himself in due time inherit a nice little fortune. What has been done once may be done again, and George had borrowed already. To fill one hole he must dig another; and though the second hole must necessarily be a little larger than the first, it need scarcely be big enough to bury himself in.

Yet in a little while his debts worried him, and not without cause. Mr. Curtice, who was supposed to be a solicitor, and was a billiard-sharp, horse-chaunter, Jew usurer's tout, and so on, was a man who knew how to be exigent, and it was to him that George applied for help. Mr. Curtice was helpful first and exigent afterwards. George's life became a nuisance to him. The billiard-sharping solicitor dogged him with threats of open proceedings; and, as most of us know by experience, folly looks extra-foolish when threatened with detection, and mere peccadilloes in the dawn of exposure assume aspects mean and criminal. When, by way of miracle, we do see ourselves as others are likely to see us, we are rarely flattered. There was a way out of trouble which some people would have called mean; but after all, when George had looked at it long enough, he felt the path a just one, and took it. There are actions by no means reprehensible, for the performance of which one desires a clear field; and George, though he knew himself justified, wished for secresy. His plan was simple — he had resolved

to antedate possession of a little portion of his own: he was going, in short, to rob his father. Now, that is an action about which many theories may be constructed, and in this case there were many excuses for it. Daniel had greatly more money than he wanted; George was his undisputed heir: and yet the old man was parsimonious. And whom is a high-spirited young fellow to rob if not his own father? In brief, George silenced everything within himself, except a voice which seemed to belong to Ethel and would not be stifled.

In Daniel's bed-room stood a great, solid mahogany chest of drawers, dark with age and much polishing. The five lower drawers occupied each the full width available, but the two topmost divided the space between them. The right-hand drawer at the top held Daniel's cashbox, and was always locked; but the left-hand drawer held nothing of value, and was always unsecured. When this left-hand drawer was taken clean out of the chest, a space was discovered (the mahogany partition rising only to half the needful height), through which any fairly slender hand might be introduced. Possibly some loose silver may have found a way of escape by this route aforetime. Anyway, George was familiar with the build of the furniture, and, being quite cornered, resolved upon the deed. Mr. Curtice had grown so noisy in his claim that the young man had made him

an absolute promise for a certain Wednesday morning, and here came Tuesday night, and with it such courage as a coward can get out of desperation. The time was more than commonly favourable, for Daniel, to George's knowledge, had been keeping an unusually large sum in hand to meet an account which was to be called for on that very decisive Wednesday. Yet, when in the darkness of the night he crept from his own room to make the attempt he encountered an obstacle unlooked for, and, at first sight, fatal. The chamber door was locked.

Creeping quietly as a ghost, he tried the key of his own room and found it useless. Despair fell upon him for a while, and then out of it came new cunning and fresh resolve. At the back of the Saracen was a long and narrow garden, and beyond this garden lay a field; from the field led a little lane which ran at the back of a line of mean houses and ended in a dark by-street. George pulled on his boots, donned hat and coat, and, ostentatiously displaying himself in the bar, announced his intention of going out, and so swaggered away.

He plunged into the by-street, ran crouching down the lane, climbed the gate, slunk along the field, and in two minutes from the start stood in the Saracen's garden. The new plan was but a bolder development of the first. He had intended that an open bed-room window with a ladder

placed against it should lead to the suspicion of such an entry as he was about to make, and the ladder was in proper position already. He mounted it in the darkness, pulled a diamonded pane easily out of the soft and flexible leaden frame which held it, and, having thrown back the catch, opened the window and crawled through into the room. Though he shook like the hound he was, it took but a moment to whip out the left-hand drawer; but his sleeve-links and the cuff of his overcoat caught at the upper and lower carpentry of the partition; and he struggled in vain to pass his hand thus cumbered.

This brought delay, and the delay carried with it the beginning of a tragedy.

"Dinah," said Daniel, comfortably roasting his legs at the snuggery fire, "tek my keys an' fetch the cash-box." One of the maids had asked for change.

Dinah went upstairs lightly; but a criminal person who at that second had lain his fingers on a cash-box in a corner difficult of access, heard the step and shook and sweated at it. His fingers, scrambling for a hold upon the box, played a sort of tattoo on the lid; but he clutched it, and drew it through the faulty partition; when with more noise—or so it seemed—than ever a key made, Dinah began to unlock the door. Clutching the box, George made for the window, and had already got his legs outside when Dinah

opened the door, and, with a strange little cry, ran at him and seized him by the shoulders. A thief was much more likely to be afraid of Dinah than she of a thief.

It was hard on George to be thus disturbed at such a moment. The hysteric rage which is the coward's courage rose in him, and, feeling the ladder firm beneath his feet at that instant, he raised the cash-box in both hands in act to strike. But in the mere second for which she had held him she had seen his face and read the truth. Before he could strike her she had fallen on the floor, and there she lay in a swoon, while George went shakily down the ladder, with failing knees, and ran, with the main bones drawn from the small of his back, along the garden; passed through the field, the lane, and the dark by-street, and, sweating and quaking and palpitating still, found himself by-and-by near a disused mine with the silence of the night about him. There, kneeling on the frosty grass, he set to work with a cold chisel, and, after barking his knuckles a little, succeeded in forcing the lid of the box. He had been in such a thievish fear and hurry until now that he never thought of the weight of the plunder, or collected his own thoughts so far as to guess how much he might have secured. Before the thing was done he had known how much he had expected to find; but now it came upon him with a dizzy sickness of remorse, and

rebellion against his luck, that he had done the deed almost in vain. His thievish fingers—he felt that they were thievish—prowling round and round the box, found in all some two dozen coins and one piece of bank paper. It was too dark for him to tell the difference between gold and silver, but, weighing the coins nervously in his moist hand, he thought them too light for gold, and his heart sank. If Dinah should tell of him! It is characteristic of a coward to grow a little murderous under such conditions.

Dinah stayed so long upstairs that Daniel, having once or twice called to her and received no answer, unwillingly took himself from the sphere of grateful warmth in which he sat, and found her lying in a dead faint beneath the open window. He tugged in alarm at the bed-room bell, and was so perturbed by his daughter's condition that for a full half-hour he forgot to think about the message upon which he had sent her. Then came the discovery. The open window, the ladder set against it, the displaced drawer, the faulty partition—all helped to tell the tale.

"It eea't much," said Daniel, "as the thief's got for his trouble, anyhow. Lucky for me, the sperit traveller called this arternoon!"

Dinah sat white and chill in the snugery and listened to the talk and said nothing. It had been drawn from her that she had seen the thief.

"Should you know him again?" asked Daniel.

"I couldn't tell you who it was to save my life," said poor Dinah, forced into prevarication; but after that she held her tongue, and her agitation was so plainly to be seen that Daniel and his guests forbore to trouble her further.

George threw the empty cash-box down the disused mine, and heard it go clanging with a thousand hollow echoes at the sides until it fell with a dull splash into the gathered water at the bottom of the shaft. Then he went to the Dudley Arms, quaking still, but counterfeiting jollity, and overdoing it a little. A glass or two of brandy set him on his feet again, and he was able to look things in the face with open eyes. He was horribly afraid that Dinah might have recognised him; but the hurry and the darkness were in his favour, and he was in the bed-room so soon after having left the house by the front way, that even if she had thought the thief resembled him she had probably dismissed the fancy. Then, neither she nor Daniel knew of his debts. However that might be, his *coup* had failed, and he had made but nine pounds towards the necessary hundred and eighty.

CHAPTER X.

GEORGE naturally felt himself affronted by fate. When a high-spirited young man finds himself

compelled by circumstances to do a mean thing, it is hard that his unwilling baseness should be of no avail to him. The bargain he had made was that for a little less than two hundred pounds he should become despicable. He *had* become despicable—he knew it and felt it—but he had been robbed of his bargain. He had been ready to be ashamed of himself for a full cash-box; it was additionally shameful to have to be ashamed for one that was nearly empty. His righteous anger even sustained him against the assaults of conscience. Indeed, he had other things to think about than the upbraidings of the inward voice.

There was Curtice's money to be paid. Curse Curtice! That, with all the changes rung upon it, was well enough as a momentary relief, but it brought no lasting balm to George's heart. It was nice to curse Curtice; it would have been delicious to maltreat him, if the thing could have been done safely; but then the creditor was a big man with a taste for boxing; and, even if it had been possible to thrash him, the debt would still remain unpaid, and George's signature at the bottom of the bill unobliterated. George confessed to himself in the form of Shylock's taunt to Gratiano: rage as he would, he could not rail the seal from off the bond. If only somebody else who hated Curtice as much as he did would run the risk of poisoning him! But there are some things altogether too desirable ever to come true.

Even at five-and-twenty a sleepless night results in pallor; and wrinkles, hitherto lying invisible upon the skin, as secret writing upon paper, start into life. The hollow clang of the empty cash-box as it beat from side to side of the mine, and the final splash it gave at the bottom, made no good sleeping-music. Daniel, in these late days of life, did not rise for breakfast, and on the fateful morning when the inconvenient Curtice was decisively to be met, even Dinah did not appear until George's meal was nearly over. When she entered the room it was plainly to be seen that she also had passed but a poor night. Of all the griefs she had suffered, this new one was the heaviest and the sharpest to endure. She had been praying and crying all night, as women do, and she was sore perplexed. Could she do anything to save her child from the pit to which he seemed to be hastening? Dare she warn him? Dare she acknowledge her last night's recognition of the thief? Would such an acknowledgment serve to scare him from his evil courses, or would it drive him into recklessness? She would perhaps have dared to tell him of her knowledge, but that her shame and its anguish seemed too great already to bear increasing by a spoken admission of them.

George felt that it would appear odd in him if he made no allusion to an incident so unusual as a robbery at the Saracen. But it was hard

for him to find words which should sound commonplace, and harder still to speak them unconcernedly.

"I couldn't make head or tail of the governor's yarn last night, Dinah," he said at last, having twice or thrice cleared his throat. "Did you see the fellow?"

His back was half turned to her, and the newspaper he held was so arranged as to conceal his face. He knew the stroke a bold one—it was so bold that his heart seemed to stop whilst he made it—but nobody fights more pluckily than a coward in a corner, though his strokes are sometimes wild enough to damage himself rather than his adversary. Dinah gave no answer.

"Can't you hear?" asked George, rustling his newspaper angrily and turning his back fairly upon her. He felt that she was looking at him, and he heard her feet moving slowly on the sanded floor. "Did you see the fellow? Hang it all! I suppose it hasn't quite frightened your wits away!" If he had but a chance to seem ill-tempered she might miss his agitation. "Did you see him?"

"Yes," said Dinah, in a whisper. It would be difficult to tell in whose ears the whisper sounded more terrible—his or hers.

"Should you"—said George, with his back still turned to her—"should you know him again?" He poured a cup of tea over the table-cloth as he asked the question. Before it was answered Dinah stood in front of him, and he could feel

that she was looking at him still. "What's come to you?" he asked with a sickly pretence of contempt. "Can't you speak?" He dared not raise his eyes. "Should you know him again?"

"Yes," said Dinah, and then for a second or two their eyes met, in spite of him.

He tried to ask "Who was it?" but his voice failed him. He tried to brave her look and his own quailing heart, but they bore him down, and he stirred at an empty cup and pretended to drink from it. Dinah began to cry, and, in the shame and grief which oppressed her, could think of nothing better than to run away. George's knees were so weak for a moment that he could not rise. To have failed and then to have been detected was unusually hard measure, and the detection made everything else look awkward. Dinah had not told so far, but the young man did not know how long he could count upon her forbearance. If his debts should become known at home, there would be a row of course, and Daniel Banks most assuredly would not pay them, though he might use a father's privilege, and be excessively disagreeable about them.

Curtice was lounging in the road when at last George left the door of the Saracen.

"Good morning, Mr. Banks," said Curtice, civilly enough, to look at.

"When did I promise to pay you?" asked George with intentionally offensive magnificence.

"I'm not the sort of fellow to cringe to a hound like this," said George internally, "simply because I owe him money." And to do him justice, he never cringed except where thrift might follow fawning. It was hopeless to cringe here, and he knew it.

"Twelve to-day," said Curtice.

"Then, don't bother me till twelve to-day," said George, walking on.

"All right," said Curtice, quickening his step to keep alongside, "I can't wait any longer, mind."

"Don't trouble yourself," returned the debtor, "until you're asked to wait."

"All right," repeated Curtice, dropping a step behind. "Twelve to-day at the Dudley." George marched on, and the creditor, stopping to light a cigar, murmured to himself his belief that he would get his money, after all. But in the debtor's heart, fear and desperation sat side by side, and altogether his emotions were unenviable. He had two hours and a half in which to find the sum required. Not to find it meant open shame, and nobody knew what of evil consequences beside. His employer was a man of notorious strictness, and his father was the last man in the world either to condone or remove the ground of offence.

When the Rightful Heir to old Joe Bushell's fortune reached the house of the Wrongful Heir

who held the fortune, he found that his employer had been called away to London on urgent business, and had gone up by the night train, leaving behind him a letter of instructions. He would either be down again that night, or would forward fresh orders. George sat down before the fire to think, holding the letter in his hand. The kind of grief which had fallen upon him is noticeable for always occurring at the wrong time. There was a perfectly dark horse he knew of, which would infallibly have pulled him through this had it happened two months later. The dark horse was the dearest of all dead certainties, and was really to be relied upon. He stood already to win three hundred pounds upon this animal's achievements, and if by any means it were possible to keep Curtice off until the race was won, George was safe. But Curtice would only be held off by being paid—an impossible condition.

The sight of means to do prompts to the deed. Young gentlemen holding situations of trust, and finding themselves in unpleasant corners, have sometimes made a way of escape by the betrayal of their trust. "George Bushell," written in a laboured heavy hand, stared at George Banks (who was George Bushell without knowing it) from the paper he held in his hand. It was not a difficult signature to imitate. When George took up a sheet of note-paper and, laying it over the

letter, set the two against a window pane and traced the signature with a lead pencil, he did nobody any wrong. When, seating himself at the table, he elaborately painted-in the clumsy up and down-strokes in ink, he was still quite within the pale of the law. Despair made experiments, that was all. Forgery is a dangerous game to play, as any young gentleman of business cultivation knows. And yet—George Bushell's business had drifted, bit by bit, so completely into the hands of George Banks, and the young fellow had so exclusive a control of things, that it might be easy to conceal it until the dark horse should have time to extricate him from his difficulties. And there was no denying that the imitation before him was complete enough to deceive a casual observer. Curtice could not be put off any longer. If Ethel were pressed, there was no reason why she should not marry him a month or two sooner than the date she was already willing to fix, and in that case old Daniel would come down pretty handsomely for house and furniture. Then, having ready money for house and furniture, it was possible to go in debt for them even if the dark horse failed, though that of course was nonsense.

The imitation of the signature was admirable. They were written with the same pen and the same ink and on the same sort of paper. George cut the two out and shook them in his hat, and found it a difficult thing to say which

was his own and which his employer's; until he detected on the back of the imitation the trace the pencil had left in pressing upon the paper.

At twelve o'clock that day Mr. Curtice was paid. George had unwittingly signed his own name, and had illegally secured a little portion of the property to which he was legally entitled.

"In for a penny, in for a pound," is a very good maxim in its way. Since the dark horse—whose name, by the way, was Erebus—was good for three hundred pounds in the fulness of time, it was scarcely worth George's while to forge a cheque which was merely large enough to cover Curtice's claims. He impawned the whole of the dark horse's future earnings, and had something over a hundred pounds in hand. Curtice was discreet, and nobody except the people concerned had any knowledge of George's late indebtedness. At the Dudley Arms that evening the young man shone resplendent, and his luck took a turn which was nothing short of wonderful. There might be a way to wealth even in shilling pool if a man could always win at it. George took his success as an omen of good fortune. His luck had turned. He needed some sort of consolation for the miseries which hung over him, though they only occasionally touched him. Dinah's secrecy never seemed certain for a moment, and

for a dashing young man, whose social qualities and personal appearance were so widely admired, it was unpleasant to have to be carefully civil to a sister who might in any moment of pique draw down ruin. It was not in him to understand how impossible such a betrayal would have looked to Dinah's eyes. The woman whose heart through all these dreary years had been faithful to the lover of her girlhood was in one hemisphere and he in another, mother and son though they were. If you ask me from whom George inherited his nature, I own that I cannot tell. For the lost Joe, though invertebrate, was a lad of good impulses and an honest and gentle nature, and George's mother was as loyal and true a creature as ever wore woman's shape. That says much, and is intended to say much. But every beast, as young Joe had years since told the Reverend Paul, acts after its own instinct and judges after its own nature, and George judged his mother by the only standard he had; and the result of his judgment made him tremble for his own safety.

It may have been some grace in him, it may have been the weather, it may have been the seductive force of shilling pool which held him from Ethel's presence for three or four days after the settlement of Curtice's account. But the Sunday afternoon being fine, he walked over to Quarrymoor, not unassailed by qualms of con-

science. For there is something in the presence of a good woman with whom a man is in love which seems almost to detect the past committal of any wrong by her lover. Even a little thing reproaches under such circumstances. I remember how guilty last night's game at loo used to look when I was first in love and met Beauty and Grace and Goodness in the chapel porch on a Sunday morning. To be in love makes the conscience tender, and love's pure eyes seem so to look through a man that he can scarcely think of hiding anything from them.

By this time Ethel was far enough advanced in love to run eagerly forward at the sight of George's broad-shouldered and well-knit figure, and met him at the gate. She was no more a mere receiver of caresses, but had learned—quite easily—to caress. And in her inmost heart she thought George the handsomest, the cleverest, the most modest, the most honourable of men. Oh, the pity of it, Iago! the pity of it!

On this particular Sunday she ran out to meet him at the gate, and they walked indoors together demurely enough. But once inside the dimly-lighted hall, George stooped down to kiss her, and she put both her arms about his neck and kissed him back again, with no pretence of coyness. Pretences of any sort were rather out of this young lady's way, and for some reason or

no reason she was full that day of an unusual tenderness and gentle gaiety which made her face at once soft and arch, so that her lips moved gently with deep feeling and her eyes laughed at the same moment for innocent gladness of heart. A compound mood, which I am pleased to believe is not uncommon to good girls who are in love; and a mood in which even a plain woman would be downright delightful to a dull lover.

There is no finer armour than egotism, but even egotism has crevices that a needle can be got through by chance or skill. George was well-protected, but for once he was wounded, and the needle pricked so deep and keen that the tears sprang into his eyes.

"I'm not worthy of you, my darling," he whispered. "I'm not worthy of the love you give me."

He really meant it, and saw for a second or two how true it was. Love is a continual worker of miracles,

"George!" cried Ethel in a wounded voice. Who has the right to depreciate a woman's idol? Even the oracle himself is no oracle if he dare to tell her the truth about his own right to her worship. But of course his humility was beautiful, and of course she loved him the more for it, if that were possible.

"I don't believe," said George, "that any man

would be worthy of your love." The proposition set forth in this general manner became a compliment, fitly to be answered by a kiss, which meant amongst other things—

"*I* am not worthy of *you*. You are worthy of a queen. And as for men in general, I believe you."

In her mixed mood of gaiety and tenderness she charmed the young man from his self-accusing thoughts. They were never likely to abide long with him, and, by-and-by, seeing how favourable the time was, he began to urge her about the hastening of the wedding-day. She resisted him—he asked for reasons—she had none to give—and, in short, he won in a canter. They settled it between themselves — with her mother's consent, they would be married in two months' time. At the tea-table George laid the new scheme before Mrs. Donne, who, apart from a vague opposition on the score of dresses to be made, had no objection to offer. She liked the young fellow, and thought that he and her daughter made a pretty pair. She had, besides, a strong dislike to lengthy waiting in a case like this where two young people who were old enough to do it had thoroughly made up their minds.

That night in church George turned things over in his mind. His employer was back again, and had displayed no more curiosity than common about the conduct of recent business. There would

come an overhauling of the pass-book and so forth by-and-by, and George would have that in his own hands and would make his return for his employer's inspection. Nothing seemed less likely than discovery, if only the hole he had made could be filled up in the space of a month or so. To leave it open would be inevitably to tumble into it. But now, with the marriage definitely arranged, everything would go well, and he would never be fool enough to peril his safety again. Ethel on her marriage would surely come into possession of some little ready money, and old Daniel was certain to behave pretty handsomely. George had in his breast-pocket at that moment something over a hundred pounds in notes, and as he thought things over, staring at the Vicar in rapt attention to his own affairs, he decided that it would be well to put the money into safe keeping.

"Ethel," he said, when, in the interval between church and supper, they sat alone in the parlour, "I want you to do me a favour."

"Yes?" said Ethel, smiling in anticipation.

"Put your hand into this pocket," said George, holding his coat open, "and see what you'll find there."

Ethel did as she was told, and brought out a bundle of five-pound notes. Holding the bundle in her hand, she looked inquiry at her sweetheart.

"I'm not an economical man by nature,"

said the young man, "but I've begun to save a little for an event you know of, and that's my first achievement."

"What a sum of money!" said Ethel.

"Yes," replied George, "more than a hundred pounds. Now, that goes towards house-keeping."

"Yes!" said Ethel, quite delightedly.

"At least," explained the young man, with greater caution, "that is what it's intended for at present. But I have embarked in a business transaction which may call for capital at any moment. Except for that, I am resolved not to touch it. Now, if I keep it myself I shan't keep it long, I know, for I am a dreadfully extravagant fellow."

"You are too generous," said Ethel.

"Well — I am," responded George, with the air a man generally puts on when admitting that sort of failing. "But I want you to keep the money for me, so that it can only be used for one of two specific objects."

"You want me to keep it for you?"

"Yes. If I bank it, I can go and draw it out when I like, and I don't want to be tempted. But if it's once in your hands, I can only draw it at actual need. You'll be my banker, won't you?"

"Suppose," said Ethel, "that it should be stolen?"

"Nonsense, my darling," said George. "Lock it in a drawer upstairs."

"Oh," said Ethel merrily, "it would be easy for a burglar to put a ladder against the window and get into the room that way in the dark." George said nothing. "And suppose," said Ethel, "that I should just be running into the room at the time, and should be frightened out of my wits for ever. Wouldn't *that* be dreadful! Why, George, what's the matter? You are ill!"

"No," said George. "A little twinge. Nothing to speak of. There! I'm all right again." But his cheeks, which commonly kept a remarkable bloom, all things considered, were chalky in their hue, and his stare was a little ghastly. Ethel's imagination could scarcely have led her to a theme less pleasant for her lover's ears. Yet, how was she to know that? Even George saw clearly that he had started at a shadow which he himself had thrown. "Don't let anybody know about the money, Ethel," he said, a second or two later. Her chance speech had made him timorous, and he began to fear lest a word about the trust he had reposed in her should lead to suspicion and detection. "Let nobody know," he urged; "keep it a secret. Will you promise?"

"Yes," she answered, somewhat surprised by his vehemence; "I promise."

"Run away upstairs with it," said George,

with an unsuccessful smile. "Don't let it be seen."

"He is nervous about *me*," thought Ethel. She was sure that in his own behalf he was as bold as a lion; but it was evident that he could not even bear to think of danger approaching her. If that reflection should seem a little self-conscious on the girl's part, remember that she was in love. Of course it was sweet to think that even the thought of a possible danger for her could so move him. Love, as I have said already, is a rare epicure.

Ethel ran upstairs and locked the notes into an old-fashioned little cabinet which had a transparently undeceptive secret drawer. She kissed the bundle before she put it away—not, you may be sure, because it was worth more than a hundred pounds. It was worth a great deal more than many hundreds of pounds to her because she thought she saw in it the fruit of effort and glad self-denial for love's sake. Love had earned it, so she thought; love gave it; it was to help love to live gracefully. No miser ever hugged money so gladly, and no spendthrift ever thought less of its practical value. George was waiting below, and was feeling a good deal unhinged when she returned.

"My darling," she said, "you haven't been frightened by my silly speech about myself?"

"No, dear, no!" said he with an effort.

"It was very silly for me to hint at such a thing," said Ethel. "You won't like me to keep the money now."

George with a coward's courage turned upon the situation, so to speak, and struck out at it.

"My dear, I confess that the suggestion alarmed me. Shall I tell you why? It's a very singular coincidence, but my sister was alarmed a st week in the very way you indicated." Ethel lwas astonished, and he related the incident with dramatic force. It was a good move, or so he told himself. Ethel and Dinah were growing companionable. His sweetheart would be sure to mention the story to Dinah, and she, learning that he had told it, would find her suspicions shaken by the very effrontery of the thing. And in any case Ethel would be still less inclined to believe any horrible future accusation against him, since he himself had voluntarily alluded to the tale.

Days went on, and Erebus came into the light and became a favourite. When George had backed the dark horse, he was going begging at thirty to one. Now it was a hard matter to get three to two against him. George felt that this turn of fortune was absolutely providential. But it happened one dull afternoon, when Mr. Bushell was prowling about amidst the fragments in the waste-paper basket, looking for a scrap small enough to light his pipe with, that he made a discovery. And here it may be noticed that

people who commit offences against the law are constantly guilty of the most surprising stupidities. The least capable of the human race are forgers and murderers. They go about with an infantile simplicity to make avenues to detection. They leave trails behind them which even the police have not the ingenuity to miss. And Master George had positively left undestroyed the real signature from which he had made his first rough copy, and the copy itself. Slow George Bushell was about to burn his fingers by attempting to light one of these tiny scraps at the fire. The larger scraps were of no service or value, but it was part of his character to save useless things. As he was gingerly pushing the scrap of paper through the bars, he caught sight of the writing upon it, and, lifting it nearer to his eyes, read his own name. There was nothing very peculiar about it at first sight, but yet—why should anybody have cut off his signature from the tail of a letter? And here was another bit of paper lying on the hearthrug, which being picked up also proved to have his name written upon it, apparently by his own hand. Not quite suspicious yet, he turned them over, and after a minute's inspection he made the discovery George had made a little while before. One of the signatures had been traced with a pencil. The real signature, having been firmly pressed against the

glass, bore no mark; but the other, lying on a softer surface, bore the impress clearly.

"Why," said Mr. Bushell in his own wooden and deliberate manner, "if somebody ain't been a-practisin' my autygraph!" His long clay pipe dropped from his fingers and broke in pieces on the fender, and at that moment, with premonitory tap at the door, his confidential secretary entered. The old man looked at him and arose slowly. His inexpressive countenance bore no greater mark of annoyance than almost any man might have shown at even so trifling an accident as the breaking of a pipe. "I shall be out this afternoon, Mr. Banks," he said, as he passed the unconscious George.

"Yes, sir," said he in answer. "About that thousand tons of Heathen? Can Dunn and Bollinger have it at the price?"

"Why, yes," said Mr. Bushell, "delivered at the wharf, mind you."

"Very good, sir," said George; and away went his employer to the bank, where he was closeted with the manager whilst the guilty youngster, not knowing what had befallen him, was leisurely apprising Messrs. Dunn and Bollinger of the fact that their price was accepted.

"You've kep' all my cheques, I suppose," said Mr. Bushell; "all has been sent in this 'ear, anyhow?" The manager answered "Yes," and in a little while the cheques were produced.

"I never drawed this," said Mr. Bushell, with unusual emphasis, laying a heavy hand flat on a draught in favour of "Self" for three hundred pounds.

"It was presented in the ordinary course by Mr. Banks, sir," said the manager.

"Was it?" asked the Wrongful Heir half jeeringly, half angrily. "Look here!" And he unfolded the two crumpled bits of paper. The manager stared from him to them and from them to him. "Here's somebody been a-practisin' my autygraph."

"Dear me!" said the manager fatuously. He had, like other men, heard of forgeries, but they were outside the sphere of his experience until now.

"Ah!" said Mr. Bushell scoffingly, "an' dear *me*, too. Three hundred pound! If it's young Banks, and it looks like it—don't it?—if it's him as I took such notice of an' took such a fancy to an' trusted—. . . Why, damn it, it's beyond believin'—ain't it?"

"Very extraordinary indeed," the manager responded. "You can swear that you never signed this cheque, sir? The signature is remarkably well imitated."

"Swear it!" said Mr. Bushell. "I'd swear it on my dyin' bed."

"We must proceed with caution, sir," said the manager, beginning to relish this new mental

flavour as he grew accustomed to it. No sport so enjoyable as man-hunting, when once you get your hand in. "A false arrest would set the real criminal on his guard, and he might get clean off. We must be cautious, sir."

"Cautious!" said the other, with a heavy jeer. "Cautious, when I find these in young Bank's room, where nobody ever goes but him an' me!" He held the crumpled scraps in the manager's face. "Cautious, when young Banks come to the bank himself an' drawed for it! He was cautious to some tune, he was. I'll caution him! You send for a policeman."

One trifle and another had kept the guilty George from looking at the sporting news in that day's paper, but having finished his reply to Dunn and Bollinger, he sauntered out for the local journal, and returning leisurely, found on opening the sheet that Erebus was established as first favourite. In his rejoicing of affairs he arose and waltzed softly round the room, and snapped his fingers smiling. He had always felt so sure about Erebus that it was most flattering on the horse's part to come to the front in this way. He sat down beside the fire in the chair his employer was wont to use, and gave his mind to pleasant fancies. There was a sense of thanksgiving in his mind. And he was quite persuaded that he was never again to be such a fool as to run the risk of being mistaken for a criminal. For of course

he had only been borrowing the money, and yet people are so stupid that discovery would have stamped him with indelible disgrace. As for the affair of the cash-box, that wore an altogether different complexion. Daniel did not want the money, and would not have really missed it even had the box been full; and after all, a son has some right to consideration at his father's hands, and if a father is miserly, a high-spirited young man has his remedy. But happily there would be no further need for transactions of either nature. People are opinionated and given to jumping at false conclusions. To have had the forgery detected would have been excessively unpleasant, and it was comforting to know that he could restore the money.

Rat-tat-tat-tat at the front door. Then the door was somewhat violently opened. I clung a little in moist weather, and opened with a shivering jar of bolts and chain. Nothing at all remarkable in it, but somehow George noticed it and will remember it all his life. Mr. Bushell's voice, sounding bullying and angry, cried, "Come this way." George whipped out of his master's chair and into his own, and in one second was so deep sunk in business that he did not even look up at the Wrongful Heir's noisy entry.

"Officer!" said the Wrongful Heir, with something of an inclination towards melodrama — "Officer, do your duty."

"I suppose you'll come quiet and take it easy? There won't be any need for these, eh?" A quiet, gentlemanly-looking man, the local inspector, was holding up a pair of brightly burnished handcuffs.

"Why," said George with a sick frost inside him, "what—what do you mean?"

"Very sorry, Mr. Banks," said the inspector, "I wanted it done quietly out of consideration for you, and so I came myself. It's a charge of forgery. Three hundred pounds." George lurched to his feet, and looked at the inspector in a ghastly agony and terror. "Mr. Bushell brings the charge. I should advise you not to say anything. You can if you like, but it may be used against you on your trial."

George said nothing, less because of the official advice than because he could not have spoken a word just then if one word could have proved it all a dream.

"That's right," said the inspector genially. "Nobody'll think anything of seeing you and me in the street together. This your hat? Come along."

What a walk it was along the high street! What a nightmare the little formalities made in the room hung round with maps and cutlasses and handcuffs! What a sensation to remember when the official's gentle hand insinuated itself into George's pockets, and possessed itself of penknife

and keys and purse and pocket-book! A corridor, a paved yard, a fustian-clad ruffian exercising there, who laughed and called him "mate"; and then—the cell. Lord Byron has told us that until the ear becomes more Irish and less nice, the sound of a pistol cocking at twelve paces is remarkable. The amazing old ladies who get into the papers on the strength of the fact that they have been hundred times imprisoned for being drunk and disorderly may perhaps have grown used to another click which has a singular sound in the ear of a novice—the click of a key in the lock of a police cell. But nothing much less than their experience can take the sting out of it. The sound seemed to run a little icy needle of despair into the criminal's marrow.

And Erebus was first favourite, after all.

CHAPTER XI.

THE English Law, being (at least in part) a civilised code, professes to deal with intentions as well as with actions. But before the law can deal with them, it is clear that the intentions must be pretty obvious. George had intended to pay back the money he had borrowed from his employer; but the intent was nowhere discoverable by the legal eye, and went for nothing. And yet Erebus was

first favourite. Even a dull man may see how poignant an aggravation of the pain this was. If old Bushell had but kept quiet for a few more weeks, had been out of the way, had taken to his bed, had been blind—anything—the thing would have been over. For of course it was preposterous beyond the dreams of madness to suppose that a man in George's position intended to let a danger like this hang over him a minute longer than he could help it. It was more than incredible that any man should barter freedom, good name, love, the Saracen, and the acres of Quarrymoor for three hundred pounds. And it was wilder than ever to suppose it when the three hundred pounds were to be got so cheaply and so easily.

Even a worm will turn. If you hunt any creature too hard, it will do its strong or feeble best to rend you. It was surely too bad to brand a young man of George's prospects as a felon, simply because for a week or two he had borrowed from another man's abundance. George turned and stood at bay against the situation. He resolved that through thick and thin he would swear to the end that George Bushell had signed the cheque and sent him to the bank with it, and had trumped up this charge to ruin him. He would defy experts, he would defy everybody. He swore to stand at bay, and if he fell, to fall with the look of a martyr. Perhaps—perhaps—his father or

Ethel might believe him, and he need not lose everything.

I am afraid this young man will take a good deal of moulding before he becomes respectable.

The news of the arrest went through the town like wildfire; for George was a well-known figure and his father one of the primeval citizens of the place, or so it seemed to modern fancies. Yet, far and wide as it travelled, the news halted at the door of the Saracen, and neither Daniel nor Dinah had yet heard it. That such a thing could be never entered the mind of Mr. William Bowker and his mates, the nightly frequenters of the Saracen's kitchen from time almost immemorial. Tummas Howl, very grey by this time, Aminadab, and Meshach, and Ebenezer, also grey, kept up the habits of middle age and youth, and (unless when engaged upon the "night-shift") would have felt themselves homeless without the Saracen after working hours.

They had all heard the news, and met at the accustomed corner. For it is the habit in the Black Country to drop into a public-house—though you have done it for a lifetime at the same hour every day—as if you did it by accident, and William and his comrades were not superior to this transparent pretence.

"Well, chaps," said one, "this is a sad sort o' come-down for poor ode Dan'l, eeat it?"

"Ah," said another, "it's all that. It'll be the finishin' on him, I reckon."

"It eeat to be took for settled," said Mr. Bowkes, "as he's done it. Not till he's been afore the magistrate."

"Course not," they all assented.

"Gooin' to look in to-night?" asked Meshach.

"I think not," Aminadab answered.

"Fellers!" pleaded Mr. Bowker; "be we gooin' to turn we backs on a friend cos he's i' trouble?"

"'Teeat likely," said Ebenezer, who commonly followed William's lead.

"For my part," said Mr. Bowker, "I'd sooner goo twice as often an' drink twice as much, to keep their sperits up a bit."

"You'm i' the right, Willium," responded Ebenezer.

"Then come on, chaps," said Friendship's champion. "Tek no notice, and mek no differ. They'n like thee all the better for not seemin' to know as anythin's the matter."

William's lieutenant followed his lead, and the rest followed the lieutenant.

Dinah met them in the passage as they entered, and had her word for each. "Good night, William. Good night, Meshach," and so forth. She had known them since she was a baby.

Since young Joe's departure, so many years ago, Dinah's manner had always been a little tintured by sadness, but in such a way that people

took it rather for gentleness and tenderness than for sorrow. But latterly, and with good reason, she had been plainly sorrowful and depressed, and to-night she was unusually mournful. George, her boy, the baby she bore, her consolation, her fear, and next her sorest trouble, had never dared to face her since the morning after her discovery of his theft. And now he was away from the house all day long, and kept away until it was closed at night. Only an hour ago Daniel had been storming about it, and vowing that he would get to the bottom of it, and the mother had broken into tears. The servant-girl who acted as kitchen waitress of an evening was engaged, and Dinah, who could scarce control her face from openly showing signs of heartbreak, served the men with her own hands.

"Eh, dear me," said one when she had gone, leaving the ale upon the table, "her takes it plucky, but it's bitter hard, poor creetur."

"Yis," said Mr. Bowker, with pretended cynicism; "trouble's bitter hard whenever it comes."

"How's poor Dan'l takin' it, I wonder!" said Aminadab.

"Gorramity knows!" William answered, and rising left the room.

"He's a sharp-tongued un at times, Willyum is," said Meshach, "but he's a bit soft-hearted, too. I seed the tears in his eyes."

"Well, thee know'st," observed Tummas, who

was the Nestor of the house, "Dan'l was as good's a feyther to Willyum when he broke his arm a-tryin' to save young Tummas, my nevw."

In point of fact, William felt the position so keenly that he could not bear to sit in the house. He walked into the sanded passage, and there stood Dinah. Everybody knows how foolish it seems in little things like this to be detected in the act of going about without a purpose, and Mr. Bowker, who had walked away for no other reason than to hide an emotion of which he was ashamed, at once feigned an object and walked briskly up the passage. As he passed Dinah, he cast a furtive swift glance at her, and saw that she was crying.

"Missis," he said, pausing at once before her, and forgetting his own advice at the sight of her tears, "perhaps yo'd just as soon as we shouldn't stop to-night. Say the word, an' I'll turn 'em out in a minute. Yo mote think as we bain't friendly becos we come to-night. We thought yo'd like it better to look as if nothin' had happened."

"Happened!" cried Dinah. "What has happened?"

The truth flashed upon the man in a second, and he stood speechless.

"What has happened?" Dinah again demanded.

"I niver thought," said he, "as it 'ud be my part to be the messenger o' shaäm an' sorrow i'

this house. It's got to be known, howiver, soon or late."

"What is it?" Dinah besought him, with her hands upon her bosom. "Tell me."

"Your brother George is in prison," he answered.

"No, no, no, William!" said poor Dinah, grasping him with feeble hands.

"God forgi' me," said he, "as I should be the one to tell you, but it's true. Bear it, missis, bear it, for the Lord's sake. It'll be the death o' Dan'l, I doubt."

"Why? why?" cried Dinah, wringing her hands together, "why is he put in prison?"

"He mightn't be guilty, mind you," began William. But Dinah laid hands upon him and looked at him so that he had pity on her beseeching face and panting bosom, and struck the blow at once. "He's charged with forgin' on his master for three hunderd pound."

How long does it take to grasp a state of things like this and to form a resolution? The streets were pitch-dark, except for a glimmering lamp or two, which indeed rather set the darkness off than relieved it, and it was raining drearily. Dinah dashed into the roadway so swiftly that William, who had looked away from her whilst he gave the evil tidings, saw nothing of her but a waving skirt as she went through the door-way. Fearing mischief, though of what sort he scarcely

dared to guess, he ran out after her, and saw the waving skirt again as she ran round the corner. He remembered suddenly that the canal lay in that direction, and rushed after her at full speed. She was running like a mad creature when he came up with her and laid a restraining hand upon her shoulder.

"Don't stop me," she panted. "Let me go."

"No missis, not there," said William, pleading with her. "Not there."

"I must go," she cried. "It is the only chance to save him."

"He's as hard," said William, "as the nether millstone."

"I must go," was all that Dinah answered, and he released her, but followed close at her elbow. They had scarcely gone twenty yards when he pulled his coat off and threw it over her shoulders, but she let it fall, and he ran on with her, disregarding it. Down the road she sped, going so swiftly that it put the man to his best pace to keep up with her, and crossing the canal bridge turned sharply to the right, and held on until she reached the gate of George Bushell's house. Whilst William rang the bell she pressed the palms of her hands against the gate twice or thrice, as if she made even to it the beginning of the appeal she had in her mind. A door was heard to open, and a step came crunching down the gravelled drive.

"Keep it in, missis," said William, laying his hand again upon her shoulder. "Go to him quiet like. It's the best way, I'm sure."

"Yes, yes," she answered, laying her hands again and again upon the gate, as if it were sensible to her prayer and could answer it.

"Who's there?" asked a voice from within.

"I want to see Mr. Bushell," said Dinah; "I must see him."

A sturdy woman opened the gate and answered,

"Is that you, Miss Banks? I'm afeard it's no use your coming. He's as hard as hard. I niver seed him s' angry."

"I must see him," said Dinah. "Let me in. Don't tell him I am here. I must see him."

Her manner was still urgent, but had on a sudden grown collected. Bootless as her errand might seem to others, she had a secret power in reserve, and began to feel its comfort. Perhaps the housekeeper felt something of the strange influence with which strong feeling in strong natures acts at times even upon the vulgarest hearts; or she may have been moved by some memory of Dinah's kindness in time of trouble. She risked something at least in granting Dinah's wish, but she granted it.

"Come wi' me," she said; and, leading the way swiftly into the hall, pointed to a door. "In

there," she whispered, and whisked upstairs as a rabbit makes up-hill for his burrow.

Dinah turned the handle of the door and entered, leaving Mr. Bowker standing in his coaly shirt-sleeves in the hall. George Bushell was sitting by the fireside, pipe in mouth, looking woodenly respectable as of old. His face was flushed, but expressed the internal disturbance he felt in no other readable way. He was a temperate man as a rule, but on the strength of his secretary's unexpected defection from virtue he had been drinking. Whisky brings out a man's true nature, as for a minute or two you can see the real tones of an old picture by passing a sponge across it. He was naturally and bitterly indignant. He had helped to break four hearts to get his money, but he had never committed forgery, and of course he loathed the crime. He never knew how much until he found it practised on himself. And all this apart, he had liked George, and had done something to push him on in the world. He could never have been got to like anybody who was not of use to him, but George had been useful, and it had been pleasant to talk about his private secretary. The possession of a private secretary seemed to carry a sort of dignity with it, and a man naturally keeps his best regards for those people who are of advantage to him and reflect credit on him.

"Hillo!" he said, starting from his seat, and for the second time that day he dropped his long clay into the fender. "What brings *you* here?"

Dinah's hair and face were wet with rain, and her dress was a little disordered. But she was something more than comely even under these conditions, and she had the great advantage of being a woman; so that Mr. Bushell felt the brutality of this welcome as soon as he had uttered it.

"I have come," said Dinah, "to speak to you about George." She panted a little in her speech, but otherwise she seemed wonderfully collected. "I have come to ask you not to appear against him."

"I'm very sorry for *you*, Miss Banks," said the Wrongful Heir, with natural and excusable surliness, "but the law must tek its course."

"There is a reason for my asking it," said Dinah. "Believe me, there is a reason. You must not go against him."

"The matter's out o' my hands," returned Mr. Bushell, "an' I've got no more to do with it. I'm sorry for the young man's relations, but he should ha' thought about them afore he did what he did. It's out o' my power to move i' the matter, an' the law must tek its course."

Saying this, he made a motion to leave the

room, but Dinah set herself between him and the door.

"No," she besought him. "Let him go away and begin life again. If you knew what I could tell you, you would let him go." Her hands, and her very body, besought him. "Oh, let him go, Mr. Bushell. Let him go."

Nobody's temper can last for ever, and it was hard to be pestered in this way after being robbed.

"I'll see him damn'd fust!" cried the Wrongful Heir, indignant at the monstrosity of the proposal. Dinah's life had been a sacrifice, and she could scarcely miss such a chance of self-torture for another's sake as the situation presented.

"Listen for a moment," she said, laying such a grip upon the lappel of his coat when he strove to pass her that he could not disengage himself without violence. "You can't send your own flesh and blood to prison."

"*My* flesh and blood!" said Georg Bnshell. "Why, you're ravin'."

"Listen to me," said Dinah, clinging to him. "He is your flesh and blood. He is your nephew Joseph's child."

"What!" he said, falling back a step and drawing her with him.

"Before Joe went away," she answered, speaking rapidly, "him and me was married at Waston Church on a Whit-Sunday. George is our child,

and if he had his rights he'd have more than half your money, Mr. Bushell. But when Joe went away I never spoke a word about it, and nobody but mother knew."

"That's a poor sort of a lie, missis," said the Wrongful Heir. But all the colour of his face had faded, and he trembled in Dinah's hands.

"It's as true as heaven!" she answered. "I kept it secret up to now, an' robbed him of his money all the while, but I won't see him sent to prison. All his grandfather left is his by right, but he shall never know it, an' never ask you for a penny. Let him go!"

Then she released him and fell upon her knees.

Young Joe's money had belonged to Uncle George so long that it had grown into him and become a part of him, no more to be taken away from him than heart or brains. And was it possible that now — after a lapse of four-and-twenty years — his hold upon it could be threatened? Strange things happen sometimes, and it fell upon the dull conscience of the old shemer like a blow to remember that after all, the wealth was wickedly gained, and might not prosper. For in his way he was orthodox, and, like the devils, he believed, but he had never trembled until now. This might be God's vengeance on him. He was a respectable man, and he had believed in God theoretically, all his life. Now, belief began to take a practical cast, and, as revolutions of opinion

will, it shook him. But dull and slow as he was, and staggered as he was by this amazing story, he was not long in seeing the tremendous flaw in it.

"My brother Joseph," he said slowly, with some tremor in his tones, "was wu'th a quarter a million o' money when he died. Now, that's a deal o' money, an' my nevew Joseph was rightful heir to it if he'd been alive. If you are his wife, how comes it you never said a word about it? Answer me that."

"He took the marriage lines away with him when he left home," responded Dinah. "I parted with him on a Sunday — the day he hit Mr. Screed, and his mother ordered him out of house an' home — and promised me he'd send 'em, but I never heard a word of him again, and now beyond doubt he's been dead these years. But George is his child, Mr. Bushell, his lawful child. You've got all his money. Be content with that. We'll never ask you for a penny, and his father'll pay you back the three hundred pounds. Let him go."

He went untouched by her distress, for he had his own affairs to think of. He was never particularly accessible to other people's emotions, and now, if ever in his life, he was self-absorbed.

"You won't go against your own flesh and blood, Mr. Bushell!" said weeping Dinah, thinking that his silence gave a little hope.

He answered her out of his own nature.

"If you made a slip with my nevew Joseph, that's your look-out." She was on her feet before him in a second. "You hid your shame pretty cunning," he went on, "an' you'd best ha' kept it hid." He was not a wise man, and he disbelieved the story simply because it sounded improbable. He was ready enough to believe that Dinah had tripped in her younger days, and that George Banks was his nephew's son, but he gave no credence to the story of the marriage and the lost "lines." At one moment he was on the edge of a question which might have wrecked his fortunes. The jeering query trembled on his tongue — why not go to the church at which the marriage took place and get a copy of the entry there? But there *was* just a chance that the tale was true, and he held his tongue, asking himself if such simplicity was believable.

Dinah stood before him with eyes suddenly brightened, and a flush of colour on her cheek.

"I am your nevew Joseph's wedded wife," she said. "We was married at Waston Church last Whit-Sunday was five-and-twenty years. And George was our lawful-born child; and if everybody had their rights, he'd have his grandfather's money. I don't want that. I only ask you to let him go."

"I don't believe a word o' your tale," he said slowly. "If you could ha' proved it, you'd ha' done that long an' long ago. Whoever he is,

the law'll ha' to take its course, an' if he was my own child, I'd do the same with him."

"Will you take your three hundred pounds back again and let him go?" asked Dinah desperately.

It was a temptation to which his sense of public justice would have yielded before George was fairly in the hands of the police; but it was not to be thought of now. He knew nothing of the rules of criminal procedure, and believed himself already bound to carry on the prosecution.

"No," he answered. "He's committed a crime agen the law, an' he must suffer for it."

"It shall be known," said Dinah, growing more and more desperate as the failure of her mission became obvious. "It shall be known as you know who he is. It shall be known far an' wide as you send your own flesh an' blood to prison. I kept it hid all these years, but I don't care now, and I'll have my rights as Joseph Bushell's lawful wedded wife." He turned a little pale, but said nothing. "If I have to walk barefoot to the Queen herself," said poor Dinah, weeping fast and speaking with a piteously broken voice, "I'll do it. And if she makes a law o' purpose, she'll give me back my honest name an' give my child his lawful rights."

There might be something in it after all, he thought, she stuck so to her point. All the more reason then to fight the matter out, and clear the

pretenders off the ground. Old Daniel would never face the shame of a trial for his son, real or reputed, and George himself would be in prison. A wooden man, as I have said of him already. A dull, slow, unperceptive, unimaginative man. And yet he saw as if in a drama acted before him Daniel's flight of shame, and George's committal, and the popular discredit of Dinah's story, and he answered her.

"You're a-threatenin', are you? Then leave my house. I know my dooty, an' I've done my dooty all my life, an' I shall do it now." He flung the door wide open. "Get out, you baggage! I' my young day's you'd ha' had your legs i' the stocks for such a tale as you've brought to me."

"Here, I say, Gaffer," cried Mr. Bowker from the hall, "draw it mild!"

"Hillo!" said the disciple of duty, peering at him savagely. "Who's that? What do you do here?"

"I come along o' the lady," answered William. "That's what I do here. I tode her as yo' was a hard un, but I deea't expect to hear you go on i' that way."

"Get out, the pair o' you!" shouted the old man wrathfully. "I think you're i' my empl'y. Tek a minute's notice now an' leave it."

"All right," returned Mr. Bowker with sudden cheerfulness as of one who has received a gift,

"I've got the bag. Come along, missis," he continued with a ludicrously sudden turn to notes of sympathy. "I was afeard you'd mek nothin' out o' him. He's known for what he is—he is."

His employer had the front door open.

"Get out!" he cried again. "Bringin' a pack o' lies to me an' makin' yourself out no better than you should be! Get out!" He boiled by this time with virtuous indignation.

"Ah!" cried Dinah's ineffectual champion. "Shut up! Be ashamed o' yourself. To talk to a woman i' trouble like that! Why, y'ode rip, wheer's your bowels?"

They were on the doorstep, and George Bushell slammed the door behind them fiercely.

"If I knowed," he growled, "as it was true, I'd fight it every inch. It's all a pack o' lies, though—a pack o' lies!"

"Oh, William," cried Dinah, wringing her hands in the darkness and the rain, "what shall I do? What *shall* I do?"

The tears were in the soft-hearted fellow's eyes again, but he could offer her no comfort.

CHAPTER XII.

GEORGE had not long to wait for an opportunity to vindicate himself. The petty sessions were held the morning after his arrest.

A prison couch is rarely luxurious, even though a man be blessed with that approving conscience which is popularly and mistakenly supposed to make him quite easy in his mind. It is easy to be virtuously indignant about a scoundrel and his doings, but harder, much harder to understand him, to see things from his point of view, to comprehend his self-justifications, his excuses. To my mind, a scoundrel is much to be pitied for being a scoundrel. His detection and punishment are good things for him, and we who are virtuous may claim for his soul's good to see that the knots of the whip are drawn tight, and that a strong arm lays it on. But we are not without compassion as he writhes. It is hard measure. Could he have exercised an unbiassed judgment to begin with, he would probably have chosen another lot than this.

But our young criminal was not yet converted to the ways of wisdom. The rat who has made predatory excursions after your salad oil is not converted when the avenging terrier gets him into a corner. He squeals, and bites if he can, and dies with the rat-pulses of him beating to the tune of despairing vengeance. George was very angry. He anathematised Bushell and Curtice and the spirit merchant whose half-chance call had so depleted the cash-box. Why did nobody come near him? Why was not his father here to offer bail until the morrow, and to show a little of

that fatherly faith which, even if misplaced, was surely due to one whose guilt had not yet been proved? If they could not prove what he had done with the money, he tried to persuade himself that he might yet have a squeak for liberty. It was only Bushell's word against his, and he would face it out. In hours of extremity you see safety in any foolish trifle. There was no reason why Curtice should talk, and if he held his tongue it was a point in the prisoner's favour. Ethel's silence, of course, was certain. Not even feminine spite at being disgraced could make her false to him. The poor wretch did love her, after all, as well as he knew how to love, and he could not think as ill of her as he did of everybody else. If his best conceptions of her were shameful to her—and they were—he gave her his best, and it was love that created them. Ethel would be staunch to him, and would not betray him. If he were found guilty, she might send the money back secretly to George Bushell, but until then she would hold it for him, and keep a still tongue. He did not upbraid himself for being a villain and a fool, but he upbraided circumstance for the hard measure dealt out to him. Only to have quietly borrowed three hundred pounds, with the most upright of intentions, and to lose Ethel, the acres of Quarrymoor, home, good name, the Saracen, Daniel's quiet but substantial earnings,—the punishment and the offence seemed unequal.

There was a wise man in the East whose constant prayer it was that he might see to-day with the eyes of to-morrow.

The inspector lent the prisoner brushes and other necessities in the morning, and even gave him a clean shirt, taking George's in return. There was no news from the Saracen's, and the prisoner dared not send there, believing his father's silence due to Dinah's betrayal of the truth in that unfortunate affair of the cash-box; or, at least, having fear enough of the betrayal to keep him from making even the slightest appeal to home.

How long the night had seemed, and how slowly the shackled feet of the minutes crawled along in the morning! I have talked with an Englishman who was led out one frosty morning during the Carlist War to be shot, and who was standing at the head of the grave which had been dug for him, when he was released and set at liberty. He told me, I remember, that the only sensation he felt was one of absolute physical emptiness, as though the interior of his trunk were a scientific vacuum. He was a brave man too, and had distinguished himself under fire pretty often. There was something of that unpleasant sensation in the criminal's interior when at last a hand was laid upon him and he was told to rise and mount a set of corkscrew steps which led from the waiting-chamber of justice into

the hall itself. The hall of justice was small and shabby, and there were fifty or sixty people packed into it like herrings in a barrel. There were hundreds more outside eager for a look at *him*, doomed for the present to be disappointed. The prisoner was a good-looking young fellow, tall, straight, and broad-shouldered, scrupulously dressed and groomed. He smoothed his silky moustache nervously with his ringed hand, and stood squarely there, at military ease. Nobody at first looking at him thought him likely to be guilty. The women who were squeezed in with the other spectators were with him every one.

The proceedings were formal, and necessarily incomplete. George Bushell, sworn, made his statement, denying the validity of the cheque, and producing the crumpled scraps he had discovered. The bank manager, sworn, made *his* statement, and proved that the prisoner had himself cashed the cheque. He admitted that he had noticed nothing suspicious or peculiar in Mr. Banks's demeanour,—Nothing.

Had the prisoner anything to say in answer to the charge? He need say nothing. Any thing he did say would be taken down. The case could not be dealt with there, and would have to go for trial.

George answered in a voice which the local reporter called "unmoved," though to himself it sounded as if somebody else were speaking.

"I am perfectly innocent of the charge brought against me. I received the cheque from Mr. Bushell's own hands, and paid the money over to him on his return from London. I am at a loss to understand the accusation, unless it has been brought forward with the diabolical intention of ruining an innocent man."

Suddenly a heart had found its way into the internal vacuum, and it beat madly at the prisoner's side. Could the people hear it? There was such a clamour of excited tongues when the prisoner had made this speech, that the officials ejected half a dozen of the spectators and lodged them on the packed and crowded stairs before silence was restored.

"That is one of two things, Mr. Banks," said the magistrate. "It is either a very complete defence, or a very foolish one. If it is not true, nothing could tell more heavily against you than such a defence."

"It is true," said the prisoner, and nine out of ten believed him for the moment.

The case, said the magistrate, must be remanded until Wednesday. In the meantime the police would make all inquiry after the whereabouts of the notes in which the cheque had been paid. The bank manager had with him a memorandum of the notes, and, being again put into the box, swore to its accuracy. The prisoner was removed, no bail being offered or demanded. The day's

work was over, and the crowd dispersed. An hour later, the news flew through the town that more than half the notes were traced. Curtice the solicitor had paid them into the bank the day after that on which they had been drawn, and being interrogated, had declared that the prisoner had handed them to him in satisfaction of an account long overdue.

Even in the popular mind, impressed as it had been by the firmness of the prisoner's counter-accusation against his employer, George's position began to look fishy.

The Saracen stood all that day with bolted doors, shuttered windows, and down-drawn blinds. Dinah would have fain left the house on her own mission, but Daniel, who by this time knew the disgrace which had fallen upon him, had sternly forbidden her, and had indeed driven her to her room and locked her in there with unwonted imprecations.

I do not believe that there is any criminally-minded cur alive who would not deny himself his crime, if he could see the brood that it is sure to bear.

Even public gossip, which is irreverent enough, and even private spite, which is upon occasion cruel, spare something, and Ethel heard no word of the dreadful tidings of her lover's wickedness. But the daily newspaper spares nobody, and in its columns she read the tale. And how, will

you ask, did she accept the story? How should she accept it, but like the loyal and true-hearted maid she was, with passionated faith in her lover, and unmeasured defiance and scorn for his accuser! It never entered into her heart for a fraction of a second to believe him guilty. Guilty? He—her lover? The policeman who arrested him, the magistrate who committed him, the people who looked on and listened were sunk beneath the lowest reach of contemptuous indignation, not to know, not to see at a glance, that he was and must be innocent.

And so, not merely thinking him guiltless, but feeling as persuaded of his honour as if she herself had held it in her keeping, she turned about to see in what way she could be of service to him. She was quick to see and understand anything set before her, and though she was as ignorant of legal matters as most women are, it seemed strange to her that nobody should have spoken for him. Surely he should have had a lawyer to defend him, but the stupidities had only arrested him the day before, and were bent, apparently, on affording him as little chance as possible for the proof of his transparent innocence. The man of business who had made her father's will, and who still managed such small legal concerns as Mrs. Donne was afflicted with, lived thirty miles away, and she knew no other lawyer. Yes—there was Mr. Keen, but she did not think

well of Mr. Keen's spiritual prospects, and she had begged George to cease to associate with him. There were other lawyers to be had, and she could easily find them. But then came the question of money. She had heard it said emphatically that lawyers, above all men, demanded that their services should be paid for. That was Uncle Borge's verdict, and Uncle Borge was of a decidedly litigious character—and had experience.

There was the money George had given her. For such a purpose as she had in mind it was surely righteous to use that. She took the bundle of notes from their hiding-place, slipped them into her bosom, dressed and set out upon her walk. The roads were miry, but the day was bright and clear, freshened with recent rains. Ethel was a good pedestrian, as a farmer's daughter should be, and the four miles were not much to her, animated by such a purpose as she bore.

At the edge of the town she encountered an undersized coaly man in very heavy and very dirty flannel. Any lady strange to the district might have been excused if the coaly man's exterior had deterred her from addressing him. But Ethel approached him without any thought of his appearance.

"Can you direct me to a lawyer's office?" she asked.

"Why, yis, miss," said Mr. Bowker. "There's

Mr. Keen's office roun' the corner. It's nine or ten housen up wi' a brass plaät o' the door."

"Do you know another lawyer?" she asked. She had an objection to consulting Mr. Keen.

Mr. Bowker did know of another lawyer, as it happened, and volunteered to show the way.

"I need not trouble you," said the girl with a sort of sad graciousness.

"Trouble!" said Mr. Bowker, with great gallantry. "It's no trouble to do a turn for a good-lookin' lady. This way, miss, if yo' please."

Ethel followed perforce, and Mr. Bowker led her by intricate ways to the office of a Mr. Packmore, an elderly conveyancer, who had no more to do with criminal legalities than I have. But he was able to tell her that Mr. John Keen had undertaken the defence of the prisoner; and so fate seemed to push her towards Mr. John Keen in spite of herself. Mr. Bowker had waited outside, and now led her back again, declining her proffered gratuity.

"Pray take it," said Ethel.

"No, miss, thank you," answered William; "you do't look the sort to want to mek a mon feel ashaämed of himsen."

Ethel withdrew the proffered florin swiftly, with a little blush.

"I am very much obliged to you," she said.

"Not a bit on it," protested Mr. Bowker.

"I do't git the chance to tak' a walk wi' a young lady every day. Let alone a nice-looking un," he added, fearing lest the compliment might seem feebly expressed without that addendum.

Sad as she was, she could scarcely thank him with less than a smile. William grinned and ducked responsive.

Mr. Keen was at home and would receive Miss Donne. He rose when she entered, and pushed his long hair back with both hands, looking at her earnestly and with evident sadness.

"I think," he began, "that I can guess the object of your visit."

"I am told," she answered, "that you are defending Mr. Banks." John nodded miserably, and shifted his papers to and fro upon his desk. "I did not know," she went on, "until this morning that any charge had been preferred against him. But I saw from the newspaper that he had no lawyer, and I came to engage one. Did he send for you?"

"No," said John unwillingly, "not exactly. We were old school-fellows, and his people seemed to desert him, and I thought——"

His voice trailed off, and he left the sentence unfinished.

"Thank you, Mr. Keen," said Ethel, rising from her chair and impulsively holding out her

hand. "Any one who has known him can tell how ridiculous the accusation is."

John took her hand in an embarrassed way, and with embarrassment released it.

"We must do our best," he said, with a dismal attempt at cheerfulness.

"If I wanted an argument for his innocence of such a shameful crime," said Ethel, reseating herself—"and I certainly don't want anything of the sort—I have it with me now. Before a man commits a crime he must have a motive for it. George was saving money, and had a considerable sum in his possession at the very time when he is said to have forged this cheque." She spoke with such an assured and quiet scorn that John Keen's heart ached for her. But he had his wits about him, too.

"Come," he said, brightening a little, "that is something in his favour, if we can prove it." He knew his client pretty thoroughly, and thought him guilty, but there was a chance that his story of a conspiracy was true, after all, though the chance was certainly one of the slenderest.

"I can prove it," said Ethel quietly. She disliked this young man again, because he was not as certain of her lover's innocence as she was. "You know already," she went on, "that Mr. Banks and I were engaged to be married." That was a theme about which on common occasions Ethel would not have spoken to any-

body except her mother and her lover, but she spoke of it now as a matter of course, and with no confusion. John nodded again. Her pride in George and her certainty of him were troublesome to his spirit, for he himself was in love with her with all his heart, and it was bitter, to be sure, that she had so much to suffer. "Looking forward to that," she said, "he gave me this money—a hundred and ten pounds—to keep for him." She laid the bundle of notes upon the table, and John reached out for it. This cast a curious light upon the case, he thought! but when once he had unfolded the notes, he fell back in his official arm-chair and looked at her with so amazed and stricken a countenance that she arose to her feet and looked back at him as if his sorrow and surprise had been an epidemic, and she in a flash of time had caught it.

"Great heaven!" he gasped, and, rising, held out the notes at arm's length. "Do you tell me, Miss Donne, that George Banks gave *you* these?"

"Yes," she answered boldly, though amazed. He let them fall to the table, his arm dropped heavily to his side, and he fell back into his seat again limply; then rising on a sudden, he paced the room, and pulled at his long hair with both hands. At this she regarded him with increased wonder, following him with her eyes until, with a final wrench at his hair, he threw himself bodily into the seat he had just quitted, and glared at

her like one distraught. "What is it, Mr. Keen?" she asked, not without a tone of contempt in her voice.

"Miss Donne," protested the young lawyer earnestly, "my heart bleeds for you!" She faced him bravely, without a word, waiting for him. "I must tell you what it will pain you terribly to know."

"Tell me," she said steadfastly, seeing that he faltered.

"This," he said, taking up the bundle of notes from the table and dropping it again, "was all that was wanted finally to prove his guilt. The villain!" he muttered, grinding his teeth and starting to his feet again.

"Explain yourself," she answered, steadfast still. All colour had flown from her face except for one spot on either cheek, and her fine nostrils were a little dilated, but her eyes glittered with a light which under some circumstances would have looked dangerous.

"I would as soon be shot as do it," said the miserable John; "but it has to be done. These are the circumstances:—Mr. Bushell charges the prisoner with forgery. The prisoner answers that he received the cheque from Mr. Bushell, cashed it for him at the bank, and paid the money into his hands. The people at the bank keep a register of the number of all notes paid out and received; they supply the police with a copy of that register

in this particular case, and of course it becomes the duty of the police to trace the notes and see whose hands they pass through. Now, here"—he handed her a slip of paper from a pigeon-hole in his desk—"here is a copy of the bank manager's memorandum. Look at the notes yourself, Miss Donne—I hate myself for telling you!—and you will see that you have had put into your innocent hands a portion of the forger's gains. And now the murder's out!"

The murder was out indeed. In the face of such evidence, faith was useless. There was no crevice, in the certainty which prisoned her, through which the loyalest doubt of love could struggle. Love's dream was over, and love's gilded idol lay shattered at her feet. The amazed contempt and scorn with which she had read the story of the accusation of her lover, the loyalty with which she would have clung to him against all the evidence the wide world could bring, lent a doubled and redoubled force to the blow which fell upon her. She would have taken him to her true breast against the jeers of a universe, whilst she knew him to be true. For she had not merely thought him honest, believed him honest—she *knew* him to be honest, as only love knows love; and after all, his truth was a lie, and the gift of his love a shame from which no years or tears could cleanse her.

I will not try beyond this to tell you how she suffered.

It was decided, before that terrible interview closed, that there was but one thing to be done with the knowledge John Keen had acquired—to submit it to the authorities. And so on Wednesday the sight-seers at the police-court beheld the outside of as great a tragedy as ever a woman's heart played a part in. Curtice got up and told his tale, and the prisoner, pallid and desperate, gave him the lie.

Then Ethel Donne appeared in the witness-box, and the coward's heart stood still.

Dinah was in the court, resolved to tell her story to the magistrate. For Daniel, after his first rage, had fallen into lethargy, and had let her have her way, not even understanding the tale she told him with so many fawning, piteous caresses and such tears of heartbreak. John Keen, to the general surprise, had thrown up the case for the defence, but sat there in court with a grey, hard face, and never once looked from the prisoner's eyes. This persistent regard drew a shifty glance now and again from George, but John's aspect never changed. The angry loathing in it might have disconcerted even an honourable man.

Ethel, gently handled by the magistrate, told her story. What it cost to tell it can never be known. Dinah heard it, and began to hate her child.

"Have you any question to ask *this* witness, prisoner?" Thus Sir Sydney Cheston, magistrate.

The human rat in a corner shrieked,

"It's false! It's a vile conspiracy!"

There rose a cry of indignation from the little crowd in the packed court.

"The child I bore!" groaned Dinah. None heard the words but Ethel; for Dinah, as she spoke them, rose beside the witness-box and stretched out her arms as if to save the girl from this last and cruellest blow. Ethel turned to her embrace and fainted on that sheltering bosom.

CHAPTER XIII.

DOUBT is not incompatible with belief, after all. A man may believe a thing pretty firmly and yet have his misgivings about it. George believed that Dinah had lied to him, and having an interest in that belief, he gave it all the nourishment he had to give. But he felt like one who walks on unsafe ground, who cannot leave the place, and has no clue to the divination of the moment when the mine may burst. A sensation not wholly comfortable, as any successful schemer may believe.

The Rightful Heir was committed to take his trial, and the Wrongful Heir was bound over to appear against him. Ethel also was bound over to appear, and waited for the day with every

hour a dull agony. It came at last, and Master George, following his own wise maxim of in for a penny in for a pound, stuck to his tale of a conspiracy. He was without defence, cross-examined no witnesses, but made his simple and despairing plaint to a jury convinced of his guilt and a judge whom his base protestations made angry. When Ethel had recovered from her swoon in the police court, her deposition was brought to her to be signed, and the intelligent and active officer whose duty it was to see that she signed it, guided her weak and shaking fingers with such result that her signature looked like that of Guy Fawkes after the rack. The judge had read the depositions and had seen the signature, and it had got somehow into the judicial mind that the prisoner was going to marry socially beneath him. When, therefore, the name of Ethel Donne was called aloud, and the girl stepped into the witness-box, his lordship was very strongly surprised and favourably impressed by her appearance. When she told anew the story of the late trust her lover had invested in her hands, the hardened official heart began to discern a tragedy unusually terrible even for his experience. George stuck to his colours, and proclaimed himself once more a maligned and persecuted character, the victim of an unheard-of conspiracy. The jury, without leaving the box, found him guilty, and his lordship (frostily remarking that if the prisoner had set up another sort

of defence he might have been let off more lightly, in consideration of his youth, his social condition, and the good prospects he had ruined) sentenced him to two years' imprisonment. There was scarcely a lighter heart that day in Stafford town than old George's. The burden of fear which had lain upon him for weeks past fell away and left him free—free at least for two years, and two years give time enough even for the slowest man to turn about in. And apart from that, Dinah's silence argued the whole thing a lie, so far as her story of the marriage was concerned. Beyond the marriage he had no need to trouble himself, and he began to dismiss even the remotest fear of that from his mind.

He dined at the Swan, took his way home by train, and for a day or two he lived on in the usual way, until a little incident led to a big one, and he began again to be terribly afraid—much more afraid, indeed, than before.

It happened in this wise. His housekeeper brought him every week a list of the house expenses, and he had been in the habit of checking this to the last farthing with his own hand, even whilst he had resigned the almost entire care of his vast business concerns to the scoundrel who had at last forged his name. She brought in the list now a day or two after the trial, and George, sitting down to consider it, arrived at the conclusion that cheese, candles,

tea, coffee, butter, and other articles of household use were going faster than they should do. He was in a more than commonly grudging humour, and there was a sum of two hundred pounds to be made up somehow by squeezing something or somebody. He rang for his house-keeper.

"Look here!" he said, when she reappeared in answer to his summons; "I'm a-being robbed right an' left, I am. I shan't stand it, Mr. Bullus, an' you'd better mek your mind up to that at once. Here's two pound of butter gone since last Saturday, an' a pound an' a half o' candles. An' as for tea' an coffee, why, you might swim in 'em, to look at these here accounts. Now, I've done pretty smart a'ready, an it's the fust time, an' it'll be the last—mind what I'm a-tellin' you."

"I'm sure, sir," said Mrs. Bullus, in some wrath, "as nobody's got cause to say a word again' me on that count. I've been a honest woman all my days, an' if you're sayin' anythin' again' me, you'll have to prove your words. For, what though I'm poor, I ain't that speritless to endure it."

George was getting to be querulous as he grew old, and that matter of the forgery had set his temper's teeth on edge so thoroughly that small things jarred him.

"D'ye call this here item right?" he asked,

almost fiercely. "Eight an' sixpence for tea an' coffee in a week for three people, an' one on 'em just fetched new out of the workus!"

Mr. Bushell's maid-of-all-work was but newly emancipated from the discipline of the Bastille, as they call the workhouse in those parts, and was therefore naturally supposed to be able to content herself on a moderate diet.

"Well, it does seem a large sum, sir," the housekeeper admitted.

"Why, it couldn't ha' come about at all," cried the old man, "onless I was a-bein' robbed again. Where's that little hussey of a Jane? Fetch her here. I'll get at the bottom o' this one way or another."

"Jane's gone up to Mrs. Bunch's to borrow a strainer. There ain't a si' fit to use in the wull house, an' that's as true as I'm a standin' here if I should never speak another word, an' the Lord A'mighty knows it."

It was Mrs. Bullus's favourite method of warfare to carry the fighting into the enemy's country in this wise whenever she and her master held a dispute together.

"Hold your tongue, woman," said George savagely. "An' when that little trollop comes in again—Here, niver mind waitin' for that. You come wi' me, an' I'll have a look at her box now this minute, an' if I find anything theer as don't

belong to her, I'll send her to Stafford Jail as sure as I'm alive. Come along."

"Fie for shame, master," said Mrs. Bullus. "I wouldn't be that suspicious-like, not to have ivery hair o' my head hung wi' gold. That I wouldn't."

"Come wi' me!" said her master, so angrily that, privileged as long service had seemed to make her, she dare answer him no further. George Bushell led the way, and the woman, with an expression of countenance which appeared to presage a jest of some sort, followed. The old man walked to the top of the house and entered a little bare room in the attic. He glared round him in rage and amazement, seeing nothing but the bare walls and the floor, on which there was a great patch of wet corresponding to another patch in the plastered ceiling.

"Why, what's this?" he called to the house-keeper.

"This is the room Jane slep' in up till last We'nsday was a week," the woman answered with much seriousness. "But it's been a-rainin' so, an' the roof's that bad, her had to move her bed into the lumber room."

"Why couldn't you ha' tode me that afore," asked George, "i'stead o' bringin' me a-trapesin' all the way up here?"

"You said, 'Come along of me,'" the house-

keeper answered, and grinned broadly all over her Black Country countenance as her master, growling, led the way downstairs again. The room he next entered was half filled with odds and ends of furniture, broken chairs, crippled tables, and the like, and in one corner stood a high-shouldered wardrobe, which had once made part of the furniture of his brother Joseph's bedroom. When old Joe died, brother George had laid hands upon everything, even upon those things which were of no use to him. "Keep a thing long enough, an' you'll find a use for it," was one of George's constantly quoted aphorisms. But he had never dreamed of keeping this old wardrobe for such a use as at length he found in it.

It may go without saying that the dull schemer had long ceased to have any remorse about young Joe, or the method by which he himself had acquired young Joe's fortune. At a very little distance of time the cheque he had given to his nephew had begun in memory to communicate a warmth to his heart, and he thought the gift an almost unexampled stroke of generosity. Lifeless things which had once belonged to the brother and sister whose hearts he helped to break were not likely to touch him very keenly at any time, and after these years were scarcely likely to remind him at all of their first owners. He was absolutely unaffected by them, and had no present memory

of Joseph and Rebecca nor any thought about them.

"Turn the things out o' that theer box," said George. "I'll see who's a-thievin' i' *my* house."

There was not much in the box, and if anything in it had been stolen, it had certainly not been from old George.

"This is a nice sort o' place to hide things in," said he, whilst the housekeeper loosely tumbled the things back into the meagre box. He went, stepping gingerly between broken chairs and the other lumber with which the corner was filled, towards the wardrobe. The door had long since lost its handle, but he clawed it open, and rapped out a good round oath, for there at the bottom of the wardrobe lay a score or two of little packages, mere newspaper screws, and on these fell the man who had inherited a quarter of a million of money and had doubled it. Unfolding them one by one, he displayed their contents to the housekeeper with a suppressed severity of passion worthy of a loftier cause. In one was an ounce of cheese, in another a little bit of butter, in a third a table-spoonful of coffee, in a fourth a pinch or two of moist sugar. And as the owner of half a million sterling opened up to the housekeeper's vision this hidden stolen treasure, the peccant Jane, who had come into the house by the back way, bounced into the room and stood

guiltily transfixed before the accusing eyes of her master.

"Mrs. Bullus," said old George, regarding the criminal with Rhadamanthine severity, "fetch a policeman."

The wretched detected one fell upon her knees before him with a countenance of imploring agony.

"It was my mother as axed me to do it," she declared.

"Fetch a policeman," said George again, and Mrs. Bullus, with no intention of obeying, left the room. The master of the house went on opening the little packages, and spread them all out before the miserable Jane. "This is wheer my household provisions has been a-going to, is it!—Eh?" said he with withering sarcasm. "How many shillin'-worths of my property have you stole? Answer me that this minute. Wheer's that policeman, Mrs. Bullus?"

"D'ye mind comin' here a minute, master?" asked the housekeeper, reappearing. Georg picked his way through the débris of the corner and joined the woman outside.

"You don't r'aly want me to fetch a pleece-man, do you?" she asked.

"Yis, I do," said George; but no man is insensible to the feelings of other people, and he hastened to add: "I want to gi'e the young madam a good fright."

"Yes, sir," said the housekeeper in a louder tone; "the pleeceman'll be here in a minute."

Old George went heavily back into the lumber-room. The criminal was in a condition of abject terror, boo-hooing on the floor. Her employer, disregarding her, passed once more to the wardrobe.

"Is there anythin' else you've hid here, you wicked gell?" he demanded, poking about in the darker corners. "Why, what's this? Have you been a-tryin' to steal a coat o' mine?" The garment he had in his hand was none of his, as the glance of a moment told him. It was old and mildewed, and almost rotten in places, and it felt moist in his hand. A certain musty smell with which his nostrils had been acquainted ever since his entry to the room, seemed now to be chiefly traceable to this shabby and decayed old coat.

The blubbering little culprit was forgotten. George had heard the manner of his sister-in-law's death, and had been told of her last words.

It was Joseph's Coat.

He held the coat in his hand, and knew it almost at a glance. He walked into his own room with it, threw it into a chair, and stood staring at it for a full minute. There were few men less likely be affected by the sight of any worthless relic such as this, but possibly it hit him as it did because it *was* such a trifle, and

because he had found it after such a lapse of years. A greater thing arising sooner might have passed him by.

"It's made me feel moist all o'er," said he, rubbing the palm of the hand in which he had carried it against his own coat, to get rid of the feel of the discovered garment. "Eh dear!" And he stared at the coat, and went off into reverie. "I reckon," he said after a time, "as he's been dead these 'ears and 'ears. It feels as if he had been."

He seemed reluctant to touch the coat again, for he put his hand out towards it once or twice, and drew it back. But laying hold of it at last, he took a step to the door, as if intending to return it to the place from which he had taken it, but as he did so he stopped short, dropped the garment upon the table, and felt a part of it with his hand.

"Theer's somethin' i' the linin'," he said slowly. "A bit o' paper o' some sort." The lining was so old and rotten that he tore it open easily with his fingers, and there, sure enough, was a scrap of paper. George put on his glasses and looked at it. No change in face or attitude gave notice of the shock it brought him to read the little document he held. Yet it was nothing less than a copy of the certificate of marriage between Joseph Bushell, bachelor, and Dinah Banks, spinster.

Then, Dinah's story of the marriage had not been a lie, after all! Errant Joe had left a rightful heir behind him!

The first conscious and distinct feeling he had was one of relief that this discovery had not been made before George had proved himself unworthy. It is always pleasanter to escape from being a scoundrel than to be one, and now old George was armed in honesty for two years at least. For two years he could be honest and yet hold the money. Any question of becoming *dishonest* and still holding the money might reasonably be deferred until the time came.

For two years he could be honest and yet hold the money. And yet he began to doubt that postulate. The money had never belonged to young George as yet, but it undoubtedly did belong now, and had belonged, ever since old Joe's death, to Dinah, young Joe's wedded wife. Well, there was some comfort there. She had voluntarily resigned it all this time, and had, indeed, when she sued for mercy for her son, expressly disowned all desire to claim it.

"Her don't want it," mused old George. "Said so with her own lips. It don't belong to him not till her's dead, an' if it belonged to him now he's a felon." He could argue well on the side of justice, for he went on—"An' if he signed his own name, he didn't know it, an' it was a felonious intention. I've heard that on the bench

many a time. What's to be looked at is the intention. It never was i' *my* mind for a minute to swindle anybody. I gave a hundred pound to my young nevew Joseph as I've never seen again from that day to this. If he'd ha' come again, an' ha' took everythin', could I ha' said to him, 'Joseph, you owe me a hundred pound'? Now, could I? Could I ha' been that mean as to ha' said it?"

He felt magnanimously disdainful at the thought.

"Her must ha' been an uncommon foolish sort o' woman to ha' laid out of her money all these 'ears for want of a scrap like this," said the considerate George with the certificate held between his plump thumb and finger. "But sense her has laid out of it, an'—why—I'll——"

He did not complete the sentence, but he took the poker in his disengaged hand, hollowed out the fire, put the certificate gently into the hollow, and beat down the glowing coals upon it. As he did so, his brother's latest action came into his mind. Not that the burning of the will had made any difference in his position, or could have gone, any more than now the destruction of the marriage certificate made; but the two things somehow associated themselves together. The burning of the will had heralded in a tenancy of five-and-twenty years: the destruction of the

certificate might, for anything he could tell, be as good an omen.

Whilst he still stood idly beating at the coals with the poker, a tap came to the door.

"Come in!" cried he, and the housekeeper entered.

"What am I to do along o' Jane, master?" she inquired.

Mr. Bushell had forgotten the peccant maid, but a flush of virtuous heat touched him at the mention of her.

"Mek the baggage pack her things up and be off at once," he answered. "I'll have no roguery i' *this* house, if I can help it."

"Her's a-cryin' fit to split, master," said the housekeeper. "Her swears her mother set her on to it, and says her'll never do it again. I can allays keep a look on her."

"Send her off," said George.

"Her's afraid to go hum," the housekeeper pleaded. "Best let her stop, master. Her comes cheaper than a bigger gell would, an' I'll keep a look on her."

There was a consideration there which touched old George. Give him the benefit of the doubt, and say it was pity.

"I'll tek a day or two to think it over," he responded, and the housekeeper was about to retire, when she saw the decayed and mildewed old coat lying on the table.

"Why, master," she said, advancing towards it, "whatever do you mean by keepin' a rag like that i' the parlour, a-makin' a litter?"

"Leave it alone," cried George. "I want it." He was never unwilling to show a softer side to his nature, when he could do so inexpensively. "That garmint," he proceeded, "is th' o'ny one thing as is left in the wull wide world of a poor nevew of mine. My eldest brother's o'ny son he was, an' that's his coat I just found. I'll keep it."

"Why, that'd be young Mister Joseph as run away from hum when I was a gell," said the housekeeper. "More than twenty 'ear ago."

"Five-an'-twenty," said old George. "Yes: I'll keep it. You go an' frighten that little trollop's life out. Tell her I'll ha' no mercy on her next time if ever her does such a thing again. I'll ha' nobody but upright folks i' *my* house, Mrs. Bullus."

The housekeeper retired, and having soothed Jane with promises of a public hanging in case of any renewal of her peccadilloes, she mused upon her master.

"He's hard to get on wi'," she concluded, "but I think he's main true at bottom. An' anyhow he does abhor a thief, an' so do I."

CHAPTER XIV.

IF Master George Banks had known everything, he might have held himself from that disgusted

cry against the treason of his sweet-heart. It was that cry which sealed his mother's lips and kept the simple case of forgery from becoming in its way a *cause célèbre*. It is somewhat curious to reflect on what would have happened had Dinah declared her secret in open court. For I have not the slightest doubt that if George had heard the story, he would have struck out for this new ark of refuge, and would have sworn through thick and thin that he had been aware of his own identity all along. I was telling George's story over a pipe to a distinguished novelist, a friend of mine, last Saturday at a little convivial gathering, and the distinguished novelist—who is also a barrister—was a little puzzled at first sight to say what might have become of the prisoner had this revelation been made. He seemed firmly of opinion, however, that the onus would have lain upon old George, and that he would have found it very difficult indeed to prove that his grand-nephew had not known the truth. In any case, it would have altered the face of things. If my opinion is of any value on a point which is not altogether technical, I venture to offer it. Young George would still have been committed to take his trial at the assizes. Old George would have been bound over to appear against him. Bail would have been found for the criminal, a compromise about the fortune would have been arrived at, the old man would have forfeited his recognisances, and the younger

scoundrel would have been shipped abroad somewhere with at least an ample supply of money in his pouch.

And all this would have come to a man who had already consented to be a cur, if he had only refrained from going still lower in creation's scale, and growing downwards into the similitude of a snake.

But when he cried out that Ethel also was in the lie against him, even his mother who had loved him so wiped him clean out of her heart, and left him to his fate. It was hard to do, but it was yet more hard to have to do it. For she loved him yet, her son—scamp and hound as he had proved—still, he was bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh, and he was Joe's son, and she had borne him and had gone in travail for him. There is but one divine thing in the world, and it is motherhood and the motherly nature, for they are one.

So he went on his way, cur-like enough, and left hearts behind him to bleed and suffer after the manner of his tribe.

Ethel, you will remember, fell into Dinah's arms at that cruel charge her lover brought against her. But she heard the words, and they came to mind again afterwards. "The child I bore!" groaned poor Dinah as she rose, and Ethel's mind, too staggered and stunned to heed them at the time, recalled them later on.

Dinah was middle-aged, and had suffered a

great deal already. *She* did not faint, having still somebody left to endure for, but she put Ethel into a four-wheeled hackney coach and saw her home. For Mrs. Donne had been so enraged at the whole thing that she refused to accompany her daughter on that terrible journey, or to have any part or lot in the matter. It is the way of women to show this curious injustice sometimes, by way of set-off to the amazing injustice which they often do themselves. The mother did not, as you may fancy, offer any very friendly welcome to the sister of the man who had so shamefully wrecked her household peace, and had left the first blot upon the house she had ever heard of amongst all its homely legends. To have had stolen money in the house and in her daughter's hands! You may easily believe it to have been very bitter to the yeoman's widow, who was honest, as all her forbears had been, to the backbone.

"We brought shame an' sorrow to this house," said Dinah sadly, when Ethel was put to bed and she was ready to go away again. "But you won't forbid me to come and see her to-morrow, will you?"

There was something in Dinah's face which repressed the tart answer on Mrs. Donne's tongue.

"You're i' trouble as much as we be, my dear," she answered— "worse trouble than we be

—an' I'm sorry for you i' my heart. Come, an' welcome."

At this Dinah broke into tears, the first she had shed that heavy day.

"The shame ain't yourn, my poor dear creetur," said the yeoman's widow, "not more than it's ourn. But I doubt me an' my poor gell 'll be able to live here longer. An' I *did* hope to lay *my* bones i' Quarrymoor churchyard along of ourn's."

"Ourn" — "ours" — hers — was the last John Audley Donne, the latest of a long and honourable race: and she also must needs weep a little to think that she and he might lie wide apart.

"Oh," said Dinah, "if you go away, let me come wi' you! No," she said a second later, through her tears, "I should keep your trouble an' your shame i' your minds, an' I'm best away. But if you'll let me, I'll look in to-morrow, an' see how she is, poor thing."

"It's a sad house to ask anybody to come to," said Ethel's mother. "But come if you will, an' welcome. How does your father bear it?"

"It's broke his heart," answered Dinah. "He'll never hold his head up any more."

If it seem strange that Mrs. Donne took George's guilt for granted so early, you may remember that she took her cue from his sister, as she and the rest of the world supposed Dinah to be. And Dinah had always the affair of the cash-

box in her mind, and that left everything without need of proof.

The two women parted with a kiss.

"Yourn's a worse trouble than ourn," said the yeoman's widow. "God help you to bear it!"

"God bless you!" answered Dinah, and so went her way. The Saracen's doors were closed, the Saracen's affairs were wound up, within a week of the assize trial. Daniel held his head low for very shame, but on the aged a blow of this kind sometimes falls with comparative lightness. It is not experience alone which enables age to bear its troubles easily. The old beat has gone out of the pulse, the heart is dulled to pain. Daniel none the less would get away from the scene of this disgrace, and to him also it was a grief to lay his bones among strangers. But he could no longer endure to live where everybody had known him, and where an honest name had been his pride and boast so long.

Mrs. Donne's lawyer had news for her when she consulted him about the advisability of parting with the farm.

"I can find you a tenant in a week," he answered her. "But unless I'm mistaken, it won't be a farm much longer."

"Not a farm!" cried Mrs. Donne. "Why not? I couldn't abear to think of its being built over."

"Well, you know, that's as you like, of course,

but I dare say you have heard that coal has just been proved on the Hilly Piece, and that's as good as proving it at Quarrymoor, Mrs. Donne. And, in point of fact, the land'll be worth five or six times what it was directly the new pits get well to work. Rent it out by all means, since you want to, but keep it in your own hands for a little time at least. If I'm not very much mistaken, there's a big fortune underneath, a bigger fortune than all the Donnes ever got out of the surface--long as they farmed it!"

"Do you know of anybody as 'll take it?" asked Mrs. Donne.

"Well, I'm not certain," said the man of business, "but Sir Sydney Cheston has got it into his head that he'd like to try his hand at farming, and he has commissioned me to look out for a farm for him. I shall make an offer of Quarrymoor, if you're agreeable."

"Oh dear, yes," said Mrs. Donne; "I'm agreeable. And it'll be nicer to have a gentleman as won't mind laying a bit out on the land."

"He'll be a good tenant," said the lawyer. "Old Sir Sydney left him wonderfully well-to-do, all things considered, and it's been a fortune to him to find coal on the Staffordshire property, of course. He can afford to spend a thousand or two on high farming if he wants to."

"An' you think there's coal under Quarrymoor?" inquired Mrs. Donne.

"I know there is," the lawyer answered; "as well as if I'd been there. Hold it for a year or two, Mrs. Donne, and there's a big fortune in it."

This was news indeed, and now Ethel was really an heiress. It was surprising to see how poor young George was buffeted by the wings of the unattainable. He had this last blow yet to feel, but another, almost as severe, had already fallen.

It was four o'clock on the afternoon of his trial, and he was under the hands of the barber who wore a belt and carried a bunch of keys at it. Another man, who also wore a belt with a bunch of keys at it, stood by the while.

"What's the news?" asked the barber, as George's well-groomed locks fell beneath his shears.

"Well," said the other; "the news is, for one thing, as you owe me two and a tanner."

"Oh," said the barber-warder, suspending the action of the shears, "and what might that be for?"

"I see a telegram message half an hour ago," said the idle warder. "Erebus is in first, my boy."

"Well, I'm blowed!" responded the barber, pausing to look at his companion before he fell to work again. "I'd ha' bet my shirt again' him."

"Well, he's won, whatever you'd ha' bet," said the idle warder with a little laugh. "You'll see it for yourself in the morning papers."

Now, this was cruel for George. What right has a felon to anything? And yet, he had fairly won the money which would have saved him, and his calculations had been sound after all, but for that one abominable accident which had tripped him up and maimed him for ever and for ever. When the prison chaplain talked to George about the enormity of his offence, he found him impenitent and stubborn; until the young man, though more than half by accident, adopted a wiser method, and assumed a virtue though he had it not, in consideration of the chaplain's influence.

Of course, neither Mrs. Donne nor Ethel were at this time much in the mood to enjoy an accession of fortune, immediate or remote. They were driven from home by shame, and had little care to think about monetary prosperities. Old Daniel was driven away also; and four people, who had seemed rooted to the soil they were born on, went away together and took one and the same goal. Trouble had brought Dinah and Ethel close together, and had made them fast friends.

"You're sure, my dear," said Dinah, "that sha'n't be a trouble to you if I come to live

anywhere near you? I shall mind you of it every time you look at me."

"I should like you to be with me," Ethel answered steadily and gently. "Let us go together, and never say a word about it any more."

And so the ugly thing was buried; but they thought about it, though they both kept silence. Daniel was willing to go anywhere, so long as he was but led out of the sight of eyes in whose gaze he had been familiar.

"I've never been a don at travellin'," said Daniel, "an' I'm a bit mythered-like;" he meant, confused and mentally harassed. "An' it feels cold out o' doors. Mayhap I've growed a bit nash wi' sittin' so much at the fireside. But I'm willin' to goo annywhere, Dinah, my gell, to be away from the Saracen. I niver thought to part wi' *him* till I come downstairs toes foremost. But nobody knows what'll happen. Nobody knows what'll happen."

The old fellow was quite broken, and sat dull-eyed with his hands on his thin knees. He looked about him on the journey, with childlike curiosity, and made no observation but one. This was drawn from him when, after a distance of thirty miles had been travelled by rail, he saw the familiar skeleton frame above a coal-mine.

"It's been fields for ever so long," said Da-

niel, "and now we'm a-gettin' among the coal-again."

But before he was settled in his new home he had to spend a day or two at the local hotel, a little countryfied house with a bowling-green behind it. He sat there in the snugger most of his time beside the fire, and once or twice gave orders to which nobody attended, evidently imagining himself back at the Saracen.

"They'n gone an' changed the shelves an' the bottles, Dinah," he complained; "an' instead o' the clock bein' wheer it used to be, they'n stuck it up at my back. It nigh on breaks a man's neck to look an' see what time it is."

"Never mind, dear," said Dinah, reading these signs; "we'll have everything right by an' by. An' then you'll be comfortable again, won't you?"

"You bide wi' me, my gell," answered Daniel, "an' you'll be all right. Eh?"

"Oh, yes," said Dinah soothingly, thinking that the old man wandered. But he had something on his mind, though it was perhaps the last thing in the world that Dinah was likely to think of. The thing was on his mind, and yet was somehow not be got at until on the second day, after sitting dull-eyed and silent for two or three hours, he suddenly arose and called loudly for Jane and Mary. Jane and Mary, late maids at the Saracen, were miles away, but one of the

young women of the house answered his call. He peered at her with a glance of no recognition at first, but in a while he grasped his own purpose, and hooking her towards him with a forefinger, he asked:

"Theer's a lawyer i' the town, ain't theer?"

"Yes, sir," said the girl; "several."

"Very well," said Daniel; "you send for one of 'em, d'ye hear. An' theer's a shillin' for you. Send a lad as can run sharp, and let him fatch the best lawyer i' the plaäs." The girl took the shilling, but stood looking at him as if uncertain to obey. "Don't you be afeard o' me," Daniel went on, seating himself by the fire once more. "I want a lawyer. I ain't all I used to be, but I feel well an' bright to-day, an' I've got a lot o' business to do. Fatch a lawyer, an' let me do it while theer's time."

"Very well, sir," said the girl; and going out, she despatched the messenger, a stable-boy, who, being impressed with a sense that the business was urgent, ran as if for a midwife, and alarmed a respectable elderly solicitor so much that he ran after the boy all the way back to the inn, to the great wonderment of the inhabitants, who had never seen him run for forty years past.

The landlord was in the snugger, mounting guard as it were over Daniel, when the solicitor arrived.

"Be you a lawyer?" asked Daniel.

"Yes, sir, I am," returned the newcomer, somewhat out of breath with his exertions.

"You can draw up a will all right? Eh?"

"Certainly."

"So as theer can't be no manner o' doubt about it?"

"Certainly," said the solicitor—though, being a man of some experience, he saw the boldness of the assertion.

"Then I, Dan'l Banks, late o' the parish o' Bramwich, do give an' bequeath everythin' of which I die possessed to my daughter Dinah."

"You wish me to draw up a will to that effect?"

"Course I do," returned Daniel petulantly. "What else did I send for you for?"

"Do you wish me to specify the properties?" asked the solicitor.

"Does it matter?" asked Daniel. "Can't I will 'em in a lump?"

"If you wish to do so, certainly."

"Very well, then," answered Daniel, "put 'em in a lump. All to my daughter Dinah. An' look sharp about it, mister, for I'm a-gettin' on i' years, an' I do't feel much like wearin', I can tell you."

The solicitor asked the necessary questions, took the necessary notes, and went his way. Next morning he brought the will, and read it over

to the old man, who signed it. The landlord and the solicitor's clerk also signed it, Daniel paid the bill, and the thing was over.

"Now, you wouldn't ha' thought," said Daniel, addressing the landlord, "as an ode mon like me, as has got maybe on'y a day or two to last, 'ud be sich a Gawby as to wait till now afore mekin' his will, would you?"

"Well," said the landlord, who was of a curious turn, "that depends on what you've got to leave, you know."

"So it does, mate," said Daniel, who saw his drift, and was equal to him. "So it does." But he could not resist the desire to say that Dinah would be pretty warm when he was gone — pretty warm. Warmer than most, he added, warming with the theme. And indeed Daniel had a good deal of property down in the old country in one form or another, and a balance at the bank, since the sale of the Saracen, the figures of which might have startled some people.

Of course the folk of a small country town like Wrethedale had their nine-days' wonder about the immigrants and strangers who had settled in their midst. Beyond the fact that they seemed fairly well-to-do plain people, little was learned of them for a time. The new settlers paid their way and went to church, and in a few weeks they were accepted as a fact, and the wonder at them faded out, as it had a right to do. As the

weather grew finer and warmer, Dinah used to tempt her father out for a walk now and again, and the change of air and scene and life began to do the old man as much good as anything could hope to do at his time of life. There had been nothing in George's case to carry it beyond the sphere of the local papers, and here in this western town, a hundred miles as the crow flies from the scene of his crime, they felt safe from gossip and from any remembrance or knowledge of the undeserved shame which had fallen upon them.

Wrethedale was so much out of the general way, was such an old, settled, sober-sided sort of place, that it found a simple-minded wonder in things which would never have been noticed in a commonly-active place of its own size. It boasted three solicitors already, two of whom played cricket in the summer and rode to hounds in winter, and did and had no other earthly business. It was therefore certainly a little curious that in the space of some three months after the arrival of the two new households a fourth solicitor, unknown to anybody in the neighbourhood, should suddenly blossom out and burgeon in the High Street with all the glory of new wire blinds, a brass plate, and a lettered bell-pull. It struck Dinah as being curious that the name on the brass plate was John Keen. She had known a John Keen, solicitor and mine-surveyor, at home—

her son's friend, and the man she liked best amongst all the acquaintances George had made. Some of them, perhaps most of them, had been a little less than equivocal. Dinah knew nothing of the verses against the Reverend Jabez Wallier, and had a high opinion of one John Keen who was a solicitor. She was just solemnly wondering whether the John of Wrethedale had anything to do with the John of old days, when she met the John of old days plump in the market-place, and he raised his hat and held out his hand to her.

"Why, Miss Banks," said John with an indefinable air of guilt upon him, "this is a surprise indeed!"

"I should never ha' thought of seeing you here," said simple Dinah. "Is that your name up in the High Street, Mr. Keen?"

"Yes," said John, still looking a little guilty, "that's my name. Are you staying here, Miss Banks, in Wrethedale?"

"Yes," said Dinah. "Father an' me are living here."

"Dear me!" said John, absolutely blushing at this third pretence, and looking guiltier than ever. "That *is* singular. I have come to settle down here professionally."

"Indeed!" said Dinah; "I noticed the name as I came by." She was casting about in her mind what to say or do. The wound was still open. Who could expect such a grief as she had

suffered to heal in three months' time, or, for the matter of that, in three years. John was in the way, and yet she liked him, and was not sorry to see an old face, being a woman of strong local affections. She was naturally valorous, and was disposed to face this situation. "Will you take me to your office, Mr. Keen?" she said suddenly. "I want to speak to you."

"Certainly," said John; and led the way, wondering what Dinah's topic could be.

"I'm glad to see a face I used to know," said Dinah, once within the office. "But you can't fail to know why father an' me came here, Mr. Keen, and——"

"Miss Banks," said John, "never say a word upon that question. I have more right to grieve for you than you are likely to be able to guess. But I know nothing of it now. If you will allow me, I will wipe it out of my mind here and now. From this minute forward I have forgotten all about it."

"Thank you," said Dinah tremulously. Her errand was already fulfilled, and they talked with some constraint on either side until she rose to go.

"I hope," said John with another blush, which in Dinah's motherly eyes was not unbecoming, "that you will let me come and see you now and then."

Dinah would be glad to see him, so she said,

at any time. She read him now like a book. And she waited for him to ask about Ethel; but John, who was under the impression that he was playing a difficult game with great wariness, and believed himself as inscrutable as the Sphinx, repressed his longings, and did not name her once. This silence forced Dinah's hand. She was only a woman after all.

"I suppose you know that Miss Donne is living here, as well?" she asked.

"I have heard as much," said John with infinite dryness. "I hope to be able to pay her my respects as an—old acquaintance in a day or two." Dinah's mild eyes seemed to him to pierce this transparent humbug through and through, as they did, but he could not yet wound her by saying one word about his own designs.

"Are business prospects good here, Mr. Keen?" asked Dinah.

"Well, that's rather hard to determine just at first," said John courageously. "What practice there is is likely to be of a good sort, I should say. They're county people and that sort of thing, you know, Miss Banks, in this neighbourhood. And one may as well get the best sort of practice as the worst, you know."

Dinah said, "Oh yes, of course," to this, but she regarded John so seriously that he continued as if in self-defence:

"I can afford to wait for a year or two, and

I don't know that it matters much if I don't practise at all, except that I don't want to lead an idle life. And whatever there is to be done here will be of the best class, even if there's very little of it. Conveyancing," said John, guiltily once more, beginning to droop beneath Dinah's gaze, "is the sort of work I should prefer."

Dinah said, "Oh yes, of course," again and having wished him well, she shook hands and they parted. It was not, perhaps, altogether a strange thing that she cried when she got home, or that she knelt beside her bed long that afternoon in the quiet of her own chamber, for she saw that what had brought this honest young fellow here was the hope of Ethel, or at worst the determination to try for her; and her own child had once won Ethel, and might have won her worthily, and have been blessed in her love, and she in his, if he had not been—Ah me! if he had not been a villain.

I say again — I do *not* believe that there is any criminally-minded cur in the whole world who would not forego his crime if he could but see the brood which it is sure to rear.

And oh! young Joe of five-and-twenty years since, young Joe no longer by this time, if anywhere extant, but middle-aged, and verging on the fifties and a little grey, if you could know the grief your folly planted, it would be a heavy thing to bear. A little courage, errant Joe, a

little honour, and the tragedy which obscured so many lives had been averted. Is it of any use to point a moral nowadays? Do others' follies teach us? — or others' wisdom? Or is even — as the poet tells us — our own experience of much sterling worth?

One of two things very soon became evident to John Keen, and he had little heart to choose between them, though heart enough to face them ten times over. But either his move in coming to Wrethedale and setting up there had been made too soon, or it was a false move altogether. Ethel knew why he came — what woman would not? — and she was in no mind to be comforted for the loss of her own wounded self-respect or the loss of her rascally lover. She felt and thought indignantly and with many a throb of that deep wound she carried, that her plighted husband was a felon, and at that hour in prison, and it was cruel to her way of thinking, and dishonouring to her, to suppose that she would ever look at another man again. She had loved, and though she had loved a scoundrel, she had loved him none the less, until she knew him as he was. And she had no possibilities of affection within her for any new creature of the male species. She hated and despised men at this period of her life with a great and majestic heartiness. Men were vicious and mean and cowardly. What the sacred bard said in his haste, Miss Donne confirmed at leisure. It was illogical,

but shall we cry out against a nature so perverted? Are you logical when any dear and trusted friend has newly betrayed you? I am not. I have declaimed against the pretended affection of woman in my time, pretty eloquently as I have fancied. Let the wounded heart speak for a moment as its agonies prompt it. Natures less fine than hers have been soured for life by lesser sorrows, and if I am not mistaken in her, she will grow back slowly to more than her first ripeness of sweet nature, and, probably enough, be happy wife and mother before we see her for the last time, with all these pains buried, though not forgotten.

But what have we to do with prophecy? Let us get back to the story.

"I'm not going to be beaten," said John resolutely, when he had failed a dozen times at least in his efforts to meet Ethel. "I came here in the hope that I should be able to make her a little bit happier, or, at all events, a little bit less miserable, poor little darling." I can fancy what Ethel's scorn would have been could she have heard that phrase of affectionate commiseration from John's lips. "I'll do it, somehow. What a chuckleheaded ass I am! Why, the poor girl hasn't even got an organ to play on Sundays. Here!" quoth John, rising pipe in mouth and clawing on his hat and coat, "I'll see about that at once, anyhow."

He saw about it to such effect that in less

than a week he had matured a plan and found a way to execute it. At Shareham Church, four miles from Wrethedale, there actually was an organ with nobody to play upon it since the rector's daughter had got married. But to ask Ethel to travel four miles twice every Sunday through the year—hail, rain, or shine—would have been preposterous. The organist at St. Stephen the Martyr at Wrethedale was an arrant duffer, and John, who had an ear for music, was wroth at him every Sunday, though he himself went to church for no loftier object than to look when he could at Miss Donne. So John scraped acquaintance with the rector at Shareham, expressed himself as being deeply interested in church music, got leave to try the organ, of which instrument he knew next to nothing, enthusiastically pronounced upon it, and offered at once to subscribe fifteen pounds per annum towards the expenses of a salaried organist. The rector jumped at the offer, and John almost swore him to secresy, using such vehemence in his request the rector thought him a sort of bashful saint. Then the young pretender incited the rector to offer the berth to the arrant duffer who tortured the churchgoers at St. Stephen's and the rector did it, setting another five to John's fifteen and making the pay twenty pounds a year. The arrant duffer also jumped, and went about inflated, thinking himself a pearl amongst organists. Next, the secret schemer told the vicar of St.

Stephen's that he had a very angel of an organist in his congregation, and told Dinah also that the post of organist was vacant, and indeed there was no one left to play at all. So Ethel got one of the smaller longings of her soul, and the congregation within the Martyr's walls were no longer martyred as of old.

At first, when John went to church after completing this arrangement, he felt that he had cheated himself. Ethel was no longer in her old place to be furtively stared at. But he got the better of this grief in a while, and many a time the sound of the pealing organ poured peace into his heart and sacred joy; and to Ethel—while she played it—there was no longer any sorrow in the world, and she would leave the church radiant, and her sabbaths at least were filled with a tranquillity she had never hoped to taste again.

It came to her ears after a while that all this was John Keen's doing. Her pride prompted her to surrender her joy rather than owe it to him, but she had not the heart for this extreme measure. She contented herself with snubbing John, and he bore it with wonderful meekness.

CHAPTER XV.

THE Saracen having fallen into new hands, assumed a new aspect and a new title. The real old Sara-

cen, who for many a summer day had looked on the sunshiny street with bilious eyes, and on many a winter night had shrieked and creaked complainingly against the stormy weather, was taken down and relegated to a lumber room, and ultimately chopped up for firewood. For weeks the front of the house was obscured by scaffolding, and quite a little army of men were at work about it. Finally it came out with plate-glass windows and stuccoed front, with a great gilded sign which expressed it as the Saracen and Railway Hotel. Within, things were changed as much as without, and Meshach and Aminadab and the rest found it on its re-opening night no fit home for them and their memories, and so carried themselves elsewhere with a general feeling of being uprooted.

Prosperous George Bushell, pausing before the house one sunny morning, felt his heart lifted at the sight. The Saracen and Railway Hotel by Andrew Royce was nothing to him, except as a token of the removal of the Saracen by Daniel Banks, and the consequent removal of Daniel and his daughter. They had gone away, having made no sign, and he was once more safe in the possession of his fortune. The heiress had left him in undisputed possession of the field; and although he could not understand its why and wherefore, he appreciated the fact. He could scarcely resist the smile that strove to curve his features as he looked at the transformed structure.

"Hullo! Bushell!" cried a voice, and he turned to face a middle-aged man sitting in a neat dog-cart, between the shafts of which stood a slashing-looking bay mare. The middle-aged man was loud of voice, florid of complexion, and cheery of aspect, and he wore an enormous beard of chestnut colour, laced, but only laced, with grey.

"Good mornin', Sir Sydney," said old George as he turned. "Fine growin' mornin' for the crops, isn't it?"

George had no interest in farming, but Sir Sydney Cheston, having but recently taken Quarry-moor Farm upon his hands, as Mr. Bushell knew.

"Splendid weather," said the Baronet. "Going up to the court? Shall I give you a lift?"

"Why, thank you, Sir Sydney," said George in his provincial slow drawl; "I don't mind if I do ride. I'ts a goodish pace up theer."

"So it is," assented Sir Sydney; and the old fellow, moving as heavily and deliberately as he spoke, climbed into the dog-cart, and took his seat by the Baronet's side.

"Nobody iver expected to see me a-ridin' alongside of a baronet," he said to himself, as the owner of the mare touched her lightly with his whip and set her going.

"Changes 'behind us, there," said Cheston, nodding his head backwards.

"All things change i' this world," said George. "We've no abidin' city here." His wooden gravity

was quite enough to beguile a listener into the belief that he had at least some thought of what he was talking about.

"No, indeed!" shouted Cheston in his good-humoured noisy voice. "The first time I ever saw the place was on the very day when your nephew Joe—my old chum you know, Bushell—knocked poor old Screed down and ran away from home. Gad! he must have been out of temper that day, for he knocked me down too. I never told anybody of it before, but it's a fact, by George!"

"Ah, poor Joe-ziph," said George, dividing the word again into two equally balanced syllables, and putting his company manner generally. "It was a blow to his parents which they didn't overget."

"It wasn't a bad thing for you, Bushell," said the Baronet, laughing. But the laugh fell into a sigh, half perhaps for his old chum Joe, but certainly at least half for his own lost youth. "He was going out to the gold-diggings, I remember. I was the last man to shake hands with him in England, and I was quite hard hit because I couldn't go with him."

"Was you, now?" asked George.

"Gad, I was," returned Cheston.

"Here's the High Street," thought old George; "they can see as I'm a-ridin' along with a baronet;"

and he looked sulky, which was his way of trying to look dignified.

"More changes!" cried Cheston, pointing with his whip. "That was a private house, and they're turning it into a shop. The place is thriving."

"Ah," said George, who, in spite of his business habits, had a true countryman's interest in trifles. "Young Keen the lawyer lived theer. Wheer's he moved to, I wonder?"

"Young Keen!" said the baronet; "why, you don't half know the news, Bushell. He left weeks ago. He's gone to live in the same place with that poor little Miss Donne, and old Banks and his daughter. It's quite a migration. I think he was a bit sweet on the young lady. So was I: but I'm too old to think about that sort of thing nowadays. You and I have kept out of the trap pretty well, haven't we, Bushell?"

"I don't know as that's any comfort, when life's a-beginnin' to close in, Sir Sydney," said George. "And so," he thought, "young lawyer Keen has followed old Banks and his gell, has he?" He turned it over slowly in his mind, and Cheston, for a wonder, was quiet for a minute. "Are they at all familiar like?" he asked; "the Bankses an' young lawyer Keen?"

"Why, you know nothing of what's going on in the town, Bushell," said Cheston. "That young scoundrel I committed to Stafford for you was

young Keen's closest friend, and the youngster used to go and smoke with Banks twice or thrice a week, at one time. I believe, if Banks's girl had been a year or two younger, he'd have gone for her. Nice woman she was, eh? I always used to pull up at the Saracen when I drove by, and get a glass of beer from pretty Dinah. Ah, Bushell, she *was* a pretty girl five-and-twenty years ago when she and your poor nephew Joe were sweethearts."

"Sweethearts, was they?" asked George. Internally he anathematised his nephew Joe, for he could scarcely help a little soreness at this reiterated mention of him. Did not five-and-twenty years give time enough to get a man buried and out of sight and done with?

"Sweethearts! I should think they were. It was about her he knocked me down, and it was about her that he floored poor old Screed. Screed wasn't a bad sort."

"A godly person, Mr. Screed was," said George. "A very godly person."

"Here we are!" said the Baronet, pulling up before the police station and leaping down. "Take the trap to the Dudley, officer. Tell 'em to give the mare a good feed. Stop and see it done, will you. By-the-by, Bushell, remind me, when this licensing work's over, that I have something to say to you about business. That's why I

pulled up for you; but I've such a head, I forgot all about it."

George walked into the court with the Baronet still talking genially and loudly at his side, and partook of the great man's glory. For Sir Sydney Cheston was the greatest swell those parts could boast, and the old man, like the rest of us, loved to sit in the high places, and be seen in good company. But all the while, as he sat on the bench, he gave his vote only as the better-conditioned of his neighbours gave theirs, and thought about the news he had heard. Young Keen—a lawyer—familiar with Dinah, had gone to live in the same parish to which she had retired. What was that for? Was there anything in it?—anything that threatened himself?

Young Keen had begun to defend the prisoner, and had then suddenly resigned the case.

Was it law that young George had committed forgery anyhow, and must in any case suffer for it, and had Keen advised the mother 'to be quiet until his term of imprisonment was over? Mr. George Bushell was a wooden man and a man of considerable attainments in the way of ignorance. He was a Justice of the Peace, but there was nothing in that to prevent the very commonest point in the law from being a mystery to him. He was the fraudulent owner of a great fortune, and that of itself was enough to make him suspi-

cious. Of course, he had no fear of any punishment beyond the loss of the fortune; but would not that be punishment enough? It is not punishable to commit an offence against the law when the offence is utterly beyond detection, and the certificate he had destroyed had been lost for twenty-five years before he found and destroyed it.

Why had young Keen followed Dinah Banks? "I believe," Sir Sydney had said, "that if Banks's girl had been a year or two younger, he'd have gone for her." That meant lawyer Keen. George saw no reason why a man of six-and-twenty should not marry a woman of three-and-forty if he set his mind that way; and if lawyer Keen knew of Dinah's claim, it might be worth his while to overlook the difference of a year or two and make a match of it.

Always putting two and two together in this clumsy and wandering way, but never by any chance making four of them, Mr. Bushell contrived to make himself signally uncomfortable. That there was something in young Keen's following of Dinah — something beyond mere chance — seemed certain. Then he remembered Cheston had said that Keen had been sweet on Miss Donne. She was there also. Now, if Keen courted Miss Donne — lovers tell each other everything — Dinah and Miss Donne were living alone in a townful of strangers — women tell each other

everything—if the lawyer got hold of Dinah's story, he would know how futile her fears had been, and would set her on the track at once. Altogether, the mere fact of John Keen having followed the two women was full of peril for George's fortune; and somehow, in these late days, there had been a sort of revival of the memory of errant Joe which of itself left an uneasy sense of dread and expectancy on the old man's mind.

He got at everything by slow and round-about mental processes; and at last he reached what seemed to him to be the real knot to be untied in this case. What was he to do—in brief—to keep young George out of the way when his time had expired and he was released from prison? It was pretty evident that, if the mother moved at all, it would be for her son's sake, and not for her own.

"There's some shaäm in it, I'm certain an' sure," he said to himself. "The child must ha' been born i' wedlock, but I reckon he came afore his time. It's that as made her keep her tongue betwixt her teeth all this time, an' now if her does anythin' at all, it'll be for the lad's sake."

There were elements in the case which puzzled him, for he could neither comprehend how plain simplicity could sit down to suffer, nor how an honourable spirit could be so wounded as to

resolve on keeping silence against itself rather than identify itself with dishonour. But when once the central idea had taken root in George's mind, it rose to such proportions as to overshadow everything else that grew there. He was as certain as he well could be that Dinah was not likely to move in her own behalf, and that if she moved at all, it would be to endow that scoundrel of a private secretary with a fortune to which he had no claim except from the accident of birth. If lawyer Keen got to know the story—and that seemed only too probable—he would wait for young George and give him the news in spite of Dinah's want of initiative. Then, how to get at the released criminal before anybody else could get at him?

And across the stupid schemer's brain there flashed a sudden jubilant ray.

The copy of the certificate was gone. It might not be a matter of any great difficulty to get rid of the original, and then to defy all possible attempts against his property. A happy thought, surely, and yet leading to all manner of unpleasant complications. Leading to dangers also. The ray seemed less jubilant.

The church at which Dinah and young Joe had so long since been wed was famous in local annals as the resort of runaway couples who wished to be married. It was but a mile or two from George's house, and he had known it from

babyhood. The parson who had officiated at Dinah's wedding was dead, and the parish clerk had gone the same way. The marriage had been performed at Whitsuntide, at which festive season in old days some fifty or sixty unions were wont to be celebrated at Waston Church, oftener than not with much disreputable riot. Nobody would be likely to remember any one marriage particularly at this time of day, and the church certificate, as the old schemer thought, was its last and only record. Old George was not much of a novel-reader, but he *had* read somewhere of a guilty lord who had illegitimised his brother's children and seized their estate simply by tearing out the record of their father's marriage from the parish register kept in an old church. He saw how simple the process was, but he saw its dangers also. He was a slow and clumsy thinker, but he had that faculty of making dramatic pictures in his own mind of which I have already spoken, and he could never contemplate himself in the act of tearing out the register of his nephew's marriage without seeing a terrible vague hand approach his shoulder. This terrible vague hand affected him physically, and he used to get up and rub the part it threatened, walking about the while with a wry face, and and hitching his shoulder to get rid of the uncomfortable feeling.

But needs must when the devil drives, and George felt demon-driven. Under certain conditions,

life is not worth having; and the old man found the night and the day alike a burden to him. He reproached himself for cowardice over and over again, and at last, as often happens, he went with no inward increase of courage to the task. The guilty lord, he remembered, had made a burglarious entrance to the church, in "The Secret of Glen Snassen," in the dead of night, while a tempestuous wind shook at the casements and howled in the vaults. He had scarcely pluck enough for such an enterprise and indeed burglary seemed unnecessary. A public omnibus passed the church every half-hour in the summer-time, and one fine summer day he was set down at an hotel a hundred yards from the porch. He drank a glass of whisky to steady his nerves, and then walked into the street and strolled by the churchyard. The sexton was bobbing up and down in a half-made grave, and George, leaning his arms upon the mossy stones of the wall, accosted him.

"Are you sexton here?"

The man answered in the affirmative.

"Been here long? Eh?"

"Seven 'ear come Christmas," said the sexton.

Old George's head began to swim, and his heart grew muffled on a sudden. A minute passed before he spoke again, and the sexton by that was bobbing up and down in his grave once more.

"I wanted to find out," said the melodrama-

tist, when his voice and wits returned to him, "about a wedding as took place here five-and-twenty 'ear ago. There's a bit o' property dependin' on it."

"Yes, sir," said the sexton, scenting fees and pausing at his task. "I can get the keys, sir, if you'd like to look at the register."

"Very well," said George pompously; "I'll jine you i' the church in five minutes."

"Very well, sir," said the sexton; and having driven his spade into the clay, he took up his cap and jacket, and swung leisurely off to the vicarage. The melodramatic schemer also sauntered away, his inexpressive countenance showing nothing of his inward pains, though his head was swimming again, and the curious muffled feeling at the heart had returned. The road led half-way round the churchyard, as he knew, and then a by-way ran at the back, so that the burial-place was islanded, so to speak. He walked leisurely until he reached the main road again, and then, seeing the sexton in the act of unlocking the church-door, he quickened his pace a little, and felt such a tremor of dread at the porch that he dodged suddenly into the sacred building as though a bull had been behind him. The sexton, who was already halfway up the aisle, failed to notice this curious entry, but George felt the necessity of steadying himself, and made a resolute effort. The vague terrible hand, backed by a pre-

sence yet more vague and terrible, was behind him. What if young Keen should come to look for the register at that very hour and moment? Ugh! what a disagreeable fancy!

"About '47 or '50," said old George huskily. He had known that the task would be a hard one, but he found it harder than he feared. Yet, his wooden face showed nothing.

"What name, sir?"

"John Smith an' Mary Ann Thomas," said the guilty one, speaking more huskily than before. "Here, I'll look for it."

He put on his gold-rimmed glasses, and drawing a book towards him, turned over the leaves one by one. They had a faint odour suggestive of long imprisonment from light and air which reminded him of the discovery of his nephew's coat. The sexton sat down at the other side of the vestry-table with his arms upon it, and watched the search drowsily. The day was hot, and the sexton nodded once or twice, and, just as the old schemer had begun to hope that he might fall asleep, caught himself up with a great snatch, and became prematurely wide-awake.

"Dry work, eh, my man?" said George with husky pomposity.

"Yes, indeed, sir," said the sexton.

The entries for 1849 were in one volume, and those for the year following in another. George had taken up the wrong volume, but he plodded

through it to the end, and with a curious new tremor closed it and took up the other.

"A slow job, eh?" he said with a great effort.

"Yes, indeed, sir," said the sexton, "an' a dry un too, sir, as you say."

"Yes," said George, "it's all that. Could you get me a glass o' water? An' maybe, after all that diggin', you wouldn't mind a glass o' beer yourself—eh?"

"Thankee," said the sexton, and old George, still turning over the leaves, drew a shilling from his pocket, and, without looking at the man, pushed it across the table. Now, the sexton was a fairly honest, dutiful sort of fellow, and if the books had been old enough to have included an entry made before the great Registration Act came into being, he would probably have found strength equal to his day, and would have resisted his temptation. But he knew well enough that every entry these dusty old volumes held was snug and safe in Somerset House, there to be seen on payment of a shilling; and he felt, therefore, that there was no particular need to keep watch and ward over any respectable old party who wished to hunt out a certificate. And grave-digging on a hot summer's day is a thirsty occupation, and the sexton was dry. So he accepted the shilling with thanks, and having poured out a glass of rather stale water from the vicar's carafe, he put on his hat, and left ancient and uninstructed melodrama to its work.

Old George, with a dreadful feverish haste, raced through the leaves until he reached the date he sought for. There was quite a glut of marriages that day, and he turned over a score of leaves before he reached the document for which he was running so much risk, and which was, if he had only known it, so absolutely useless. He had come prepared, and slipping from his pocket a thin metal rule, and a specially sharpened pen-knife, he set the rule under the page, thrust it well up against the back of the volume, and at a single stroke of the keen blade severed the leaf. He folded it neatly, though he shook aguishly all the while, and put it in his pocket. Then he feigned to go on reading the certificates, that he might look natural when the sexton should return.

By-and-by he came, rubbing a hand across his lips.

"I can't find it," said George, throwing himself back a little, and wiping his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Is there any evidence as the parties was married here, sir?" asked the sexton, feeling himself bound to show a little interest in consideration of the tip.

"It was allays took to be so," said George.

"An' it's quite sure as they was married in '49 or '50?"

"If they was married at all," said George.

He was in a dreadful tremor inside, but he felt bound to keep the pretence going and to depart naturally.

"Is there much dependin' on it, sir?" asked the sexton, beginning to lock up the books.

"Two or three thousand," said George, growing easier as the despoiled volume went out of sight.

"You'll ha' to try Somerset House, sir," the man said, turning the key in the lock.

"What for?" asked George.

"Stifficate o' marriage," said the sexton. "All on 'em goes up to Somerset House, from every parish church in the land, sir."

George's head began to swim again, and once more his heart felt muffled and stifled in its beat.

"Is all them," he said stiffly and slowly, "at Somerset House?—all them as I've been lookin' at?"

"Yes, sir," said the sexton, "every one of 'em."

"An' can anybody see 'em?"

"Oh yes, sir, anybody. You'll ha' to pay a shillin', sir, that's all. Same as here, sir."

George, with shaky fingers, drew forth the fee.

"I suppose," he said with trebled desperation, "as you take great care of 'em here, though, for all that?"

"Yes, sir," replied the sexton, who was

leading the way down the aisle by this time, swinging the keys in his hand. "The law's very strict, sir. I b'lieve it's transportation for life if anybody destroys a leaf."

George gave a husky little groan.

CHAPTER XVI.

HISTORY repeats itself. Here was old George travelling in young George's footsteps, and going clumsily about to commit a useless crime.

It is only on a stage that a scoundrel, finding himself frustrated, can writhe and howl and shudder without attracting the attention of the bystanders. Whatever emotions he experienced, old George dared show nothing, and he marched deaf and blind into the sunshine, and walked straight on without knowing or caring whither his footsteps led him. By-and-by he began to clear a little, and then he went into a meadow and cursed his day—not eloquently, but with thoroughness. He had always been a moral man on his own peculiar lines, but he had naturally listened more or less unwillingly, to a good deal of bad language in his time, and now he felt his knowledge useful, and employed it to the full. If any stranger could have come suddenly upon this respectable, solid-looking old man, in spotless black broadcloth, hat of broadish brim, snow-white linen,

and respectable grey whiskers, and could have heard his language, it might have startled him. But before old George had gone thrice through his stock of phrases—he was literally without invention—his head began to whirl, and his eyes saw nothing but a silvery mist with splashes in it of alternate ink and fire. More than anything else could have done his fear sobered him. He had been taking God's name in vain, horribly, and now perhaps he was going to die. More than once he had heard of sudden judgments.

He crept back into the road again and walked towards the town, a little bent and blanched. He was getting on in years, and these violent emotional exercises break an old man a good deal. A sturdy walker who had kept himself well in exercise all his life long, he was yet right glad of the passing omnibus, for somehow his legs seemed to-day to fail him, and his feet were heavy on the dusty road. The second certificate was burned that night as the first had been, though he felt no sense of triumph as he burned it, but only one of aching terror and remorseful rage.

Sitting by his lonely fireside—for even in summer a fire is a necessity in the coal countries—he drank pretty freely, and at last, with his pipe in his hands and his feet on the fender, he fell asleep. And as he slept he dreamed a curious dream. He had gone forward in time, and it was the day when George Banks's term of im-

prisonment should expire. The dreamer was somehow invisible in a grey dream-mist, but in the same grey mist he saw a massive door, which he knew for the entrance to a prison, and about it were Ethel Donne, and Dinah, and young lawyer Keen. He knew, as people do in dreams, what brought them all there. They were waiting for the outcoming of the prisoner, and the prisoner was to come and claim his own. Old George, powerless and tongue-tied, waited in an agony for the door to open. After a long time it began to move, slowly, slowly, slowly, and when at last it stood wide, he knew, with an incredible revulsion of ease and joy, that the prisoner was lost, and that nobody in the prison had an idea of his whereabouts.

The revulsion awoke the dreamer, and he sat up dazed and miserable. He mixed a fifth or sixth stiff tumbler and drank it, for, like other men oppressed by care, he was beginning to fly to that false and foolish solace. In time he drowsed again, and the dream came back precisely as before, and again the revulsion of feeling awoke him. This time a dim little light of hope seemed to accompany his waking, and he struggled to get back to sleep to dream it over again. Everybody knows that if you dream a thing three times it is sure to come true. But though the dream haunted him whilst he waked, it fled him when he slept. The fire burned out, and he

awoke chill and desolate to find the chimney-piece clock marking the unheard-of hour of half-past one. He went to bed oppressed by fears and remorse, and, tossing an aching head in the dark, tried to force sleep and the dream back again. But all at once, as he tossed and tumbled, a very sunbeam of intelligence seemed suddenly to warm and light his mind, and he sat up and clasped his hands together. Then he sank back with a sigh of comfort.

He would make the dream prophetic! He would *have* it true!

Ay! and he saw his way to it. There was no hope of sleep for him that night, but as he lay and turned over his plan in his stiff-jointed mind, the clouded horizon seemed to lift more and more, peace came back to him—or promised a return, at least—and his hold upon his fortune grew sure again.

He was up with the first gleam of dawn, arranged his business, wrote a number of letters, packed a portmanteau, and started by the earliest train for London.

Everybody has heard of Messrs. Crœsus Brothers. They are leviathan financiers, helping to make wars, helping, when it pays them, to keep peace—and as powerful in either direction as Schouvaloff or Bismarck. They make loans

to empires, and count their profits by tens of thousands.

The junior partner, Sir Jonas Crœsus, who had been a Cabinet minister, and was likely to take office again when the political wheel should turn, was a grey and worn-looking man, with a face of singular kindness and honesty. He was a Jew by descent, and by habit a Christian. He was probably meant by nature for a philanthropist, but he was a financier on a large scale to begin with, and latterly he had spent a dozen years or so in Parliament, in hot fight for office most of the time, and he had grown somewhat hardened. But though a Jew and a financier and a post-Cabinet minister, and as hard as nails in politics and business, he was a good-hearted creature, and was even something of a sentimentalist at bottom.

Crœsus Brothers were old George's London agents, and he was known to them as a sound and reputable business man, whose affairs stood on a big basis. He had never come into personal contact with either of the partners, but he was known to them in advance, and he sent in his name with some certainty of being attended to.

"Sir Jonas will see you, sir," said an elderly clerk, when Mr. Bushell had waited for a minute or two. George followed the clerk into a comfortable room where sat Sir Jonas at a knee-table with docketed papers on it, and an ivory mouth-

pieced tube which ran into the floor. The country man of business was a little surprised, was even a little dashed, to see such trifling signs of work about. He had vaguely expected a tangled growth of tubes, a half-dozen telegraphic machines, and a disorderly well of papers — Bank of England notes and acceptances from Rothschild.

"Day, sir," said Sir Jonas, nodding him to a seat.

George needed more than this to help him out. He was here on an impudent enterprise, intending no less than to hoodwink this great financier, and make a cat's-paw of him; and when he saw the lofty grey head and the sagacious eyes of the man, he repented of his coming. Sir Jonas made pencil marks on various papers and looked at home. George cleared his throat, and the great man glanced at him.

"My errand, Sir Jonas," said the wooden George in his woodenest manner, "is not what you may call strictly on business. I want a introduction to the Seckitary o' State for the Home department."

"Oh!" said Sir Jonas. "Will you meet me at five this afternoon, at my house? In business hours I attend to business only. Day, Mr. Bushell. At five."

Sir Jonas went on making pencil notes on papers, and old George retired. He felt abashed and defeated, though he told himself that it was

ridiculous to suppose that such a man as Sir Jonas could devote his business hours to the discussion and furtherance of other people's private affairs. But he half-fancied his scheme pierced through already by the sagacious eyes of the great financier, and he went hot and cold, whilst beneath his black kid gloves his palms perspired. He shook himself out of these foolish fears, but they came back again, and he had no appetite for the solid old-English dinner to which he sat down at a Strand restaurant at two o'clock in the afternoon. In the course of many years of prosperity he had learned to appreciate claret, and he took a bottle of the best the place afforded, and felt a shade more comfortable. Then he smoked a long clay gravely and sipped coffee and read the papers until half-past four, and, having paid his reckoning, walked off solidly in the direction of Grosvenor Square, looking the picture of country commercial soundness and rectitude. He timed himself so as to reach Sir Jonas's house at five o'clock to the minute, and, being admitted, was ushered into a shady library which had a scent of cigar smoke about it perceptible even to a smoker. Enter Sir Jonas with a cigar between his lips, his waistcoat a little open, and his feet in beaded slippers.

"An introduction to the Home Secretary?" he said, as if renewing a conversation broken

off half a minute before. "May I know your object?"

"Why, yes," said George with a slow woodenness which looked like hesitance. "You may, Sir Jonas. I want to make an appeal to the clemency o' the Crown."

"In whose behalf?"

"In the behalf of a young man named George Banks as was my private seckitary, Sir Jonas."

"Yes? What are the circumstances?"

"He forged my name for three hundred pounds," said old George, with a cold desperation which made itself heard in his voice and seen in his face. "He was tried an' found guilty, an' he was sentenced to two 'ears' imprisonment."

"How long since?"

"Six months ago."

The wicked old schemer's voice quivered, and the great financier asked himself, "A sentimentalist behind that mask of wood?" for being a sentimentalist himself, and a stern man of business into the bargain, he despised sentiment—until it touched him.

"Have you any doubt about his guilt?" he asked.

"Not the least i' the world," responded George. "No — he was guilty." He saw how absurd it would be to attempt to forward his case by any

doubt of young George's guilt. But his voice sounded miserable and reluctant when he admitted it.

"Are there extenuating circumstances?" asked Sir Jonas. "You must have something to go on."

"Perhaps," said George, "you'll be so good, Sir Jonas, as gi'e me a minute to tell all about it."

"Certainly," replied the great man. "Be seated."

Whilst old George slowly seated himself, Sir Jonas touched the spring blind and let a sudden flood of summer light into the room. This disconcerted the visitor mightily, and his face was troubled.

"The fellow's in earnest," thought Sir Jonas, and, seating himself, nodded at his visitor to signify attention. The sagacious eyes looked straight at George and discomfited him so that he was fain to hang his head, and a generally furtive aspect laid hold upon him, and his voice shook a little. All this told in his favour, for he seemed to the listener to be moved in behalf of the man whose cause he seemed to plead.

"He was a smart young feller," he said shakily and huskily, "an' he belonged to decent folks as was pretty well-to-do. He was a clerk i' my office, and I took a fancy to him an' promoted him to be my private seckitary. Then he got i' trouble with a money-lendin' feller of the name o' Curtice, and was very hard drove by him. At the time I prosecuted I didn't know as he expected

to be able to replace the money in a week or two, but I've found out sence as he had a good prospect o' doin' so."

This was a lie and a mere coincidence. Old George knew nothing of Erebus.

"He was tempted very hard, an' he expected to be able to pay back," he went on, his furtive, shamefaced, hangdog look, and his husky voice making him almost eloquent to the financier's good heart. "Of course, I'm not a-sayin' as that's an excuse, Sir Jonas; but look at what he lost. His father was well-to-do, an' now he'll cut him off. He was goin' to be married to a nice young gell as owned a freehold farm an' other property. An' all that aside, Sir Jonas, two years must be allowed to be a very hot sentence for a first offence."

"Who was the judge who tried the case?" asked Sir Jonas.

"Mr. Justice Wormould," said old George.

"Wormould *is* severe," said Sir Jonas — "undoubtedly severe. I have had my attention attracted to one or two cases in which, as it appeared to me, he leaned rather to the side of strict justice than of a mercy which might be wiser. But in this case, Mr. Bushell——" He paused and fidgeted. He wanted to shake old George by the hand, but he would not so have betrayed himself for the world.

"I wouldn't be so cruel," said George, with

renewed tremor as he approached the nucleus of his plot, "as t' ask the Seckitary to throw the poor lad loose o' the world without a prospect. What I say is, Let him have a chance. Now, I've got correspondents in Australia, Sir Jonas, an' my object is to give him a passage out, an' a letter of recommendation, tellin' the wull story plain an' straight"—he saw that that touch was needful—"an' perhaps a hunderd pounds to begin again with."

The great financier sprang from his chair and shook the country man of business by the hand.

"Mr. Bushell," he said with warmth, "rely upon my influence."

Mr. Bushell's face went crimson and then went grey.

"I'm very much obliged to you, I'm sure, Sir Jonas," he said, more hoarsely than ever, and Sir Jonas gave a renewal of the grip before he dropped his hand. But old George had not yet reached the actual hub of the wheel of design, and detection was possible even now. It was a bold plan. He went on anxiously. "Theer's still one thing, Sir Jonas, if you'll forgive my mention on it. I'm in a pretty big way o' business, an' I've got five-and-thirty clerks i' my empl'y, and three or four hunderd men. Now, if it got to be known as I'd took a step to free this young man, the consequences might be dangerous. As it is, he's took for a example, an' I mek no doubt he's

talked about for such. Now, much as I wish it, I can't move i' this matter if it is to get into the papers an' be known fur an' wide."

"Do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame!" said Sir Jonas to himself. "This man is a Christian! A gentleman at heart! A jewel of a fellow!" The jewel of a fellow waited with bitter anxiety and fear.

"Do you think," he ventured to say after a pause, "as that 'ud be possible?"

"I cannot say what view the Home Secretary may take of the matter, Mr. Bushell," said Sir Jonas, walking up and down with his hands behind him, "but I can at least promise that your benevolent scheme shall not suffer at my hands. If you will allow me, I will see the Secretary this evening. I shall meet him at the House, and will do my best to secure you an interview."

"Thank you, Sir Jonas," said old George.

"George Banks," said Sir Jonas, bending above the table, pen in hand, and writing as he spoke. "Private secretary to Mr. George Bushell. Tried for forgery before Mr. Justice Wormould. Where?"

"Stafford," said George.

"When?" asked Sir Jonas as he wrote.

"First o' Febiwerry last," George answered.

"Good." Sir Jonas laid the sheet of note-paper upon a blotting-pad, folded it, and set his hand upon it. "You will excuse me now, Mr. Bushell. Where shall I write to you?"

"I shall stop i' town," said George, "until

"I've seen the Seckitary for the Home Department." He named his hotel, and Sir Jonas, again shaking him warmly by the hand, escorted him to the door and saw him off in person.

"That dull old fellow is an honour to human nature," said Sir Jonas.

"I didn't think," said the dull old fellow as he walked away, "as I should ha' got round him anythin' like so easy."

Sir Jonas saw the Home Secretary that evening in the smoking-room of the House, and laid George Bushell's story before him. The official had that day been greatly tried by a circumstance which made him glad to be lenient. A man somewhere in the North of England had been found guilty of murder and sentenced to death. Strenuous efforts had been made to obtain a reprieve, and the Home Secretary had gone through a most unpleasant time. He had conscientiously examined the evidence; he made all reasonable inquiry; he would willingly have leaned to mercy's side had it been possible, but he was compelled in conscience to let the sentence take effect. The man had been hanged that morning, and had died protesting his innocence, and the Home Secretary had read his protest in the early editions of the evening papers. He was sure he had done his best to be just—he believed the sentence deserved—but, after all, there was a doubt in his mind—the merest shadow, and yet enough.

The most impartial of judges and best of men are apt to be affected in this way.

"Wormould has a heavy hand," he said, when he had heard the story through. "But two years even for a first offence is not an unheard-of sentence."

"I suppose not," said Sir Jonas. "But I wish you could see the man. And life is not so gracious a business that it is worth while to stifle anybody's generous impulses except on good reason."

"No," said the Secretary with a half-laugh. "Except on good reason. This sort of thing is really not so rare as you seem to fancy. Prosecutors relent when they have gone too far, and think they can stop the judicial machine by laying a finger on the fly-wheel."

"You figuring as the fly-wheel?" said Sir Jonas.

"Precisely," the Secretary answered.

"Will you see the man? I shall take it as a personal favour."

"If you put it in that way," said the Secretary.

"Yes, I put it in that way," said Sir Jonas.

"I'm horribly busy."

"Busier than I am?" asked the great financier.

The Secretary smiled.

"You have the man's address?"

"Of course," said Sir Jonas. "He is within a mile of us. Come! the fight downstairs won't

begin for a couple of hours. Shall I send for him now?"

"If you will."

Sir Jonas addressed a brief note to George Bushell, Esq., and despatched a messenger by cab. Old George, when he came to think about it, had been comforted by his interview with Sir Jonas, and had taken a glass or two of whisky on the strength of it. When the messenger arrived with the note, he began to be afraid that he was scarcely fit to see a Home Secretary, or be seen by one; but, having sluiced his head and face with fair water, he felt better, and, joining the messenger, was driven to the Palace of Westminster.

Now, the Home Secretary—as Sir William Harcourt knows—is an important personage, and for any criminal person, with a possibility of penal servitude for life hanging over him, to approach so great a functionary with intent to make a cat's-paw of him, is an act of amazing boldness, possibly of amazing rashness, possibly of astounding folly. This consideration began to weigh heavily upon George's mind, and, when the Bude light became visible at the top of the great tower, its very rays seemed to pierce him as with darts of anguish. But he lacked the courage to run away, and, indeed, he stood condemned to go through with the business now. And why should anybody suspect him? Why should anybody look for an evil motive behind such a promise of benevolence? Who was

likely to guess his relationship with the criminal? Vague, horrible fears that the Home Secretary might be personally acquainted with all the archives of Somerset House in detail assailed the miserable old schemer, and a hundred other fears, as foolish and as visionary, chilled him to the marrow as he followed the messenger into the strange precincts of the House, where, for anything old George knew to the contrary, there might be torture-chambers.

Sir Jonas, valuing time too highly to endure George's drawl, told the story for him, appealing to him now and then with a "That is so, Mr. Bushell?"

"That is so," George answered to each of these inquiries, and his heart seemed gradually to come back to him. But Sir Jonas did not insist on privacy, and George broke in with hang-dog furtive air, standing hat in hand in a corner of the smoking-room. "Theer's another thing, Sir Jonas, as you've forgot to mention."

"What is that?"

"I can't move i' this matter at all, if anybody's to know as I had a hand in it, or if it's to get into the papers as the young man hasn't served his sentence."

"Do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame," Sir Jonas whispered behind his hand.

"I've got thirty-five clerks i' my empl'y," George went on, repeating his argument of that

afternoon, "an' some hunderds o' workmen, an' it' 'ud be a bad example. I should fear to set it."

"Well said," cried Sir Jonas.

The great official said urbanely that the case should have his best attention. The judge who tried the case must be consulted, and the chaplain and governor of the gaol must report on the criminal's conduct and condition. The step suggested was a grave one, and must not be taken hastily. The proposal reflected the very greatest credit on Mr. Bushell's heart. And, in brief, it was plain even to old George himself that this most insolent and audacious of schemes was in a fair way to success.

He gave his home address, took a respectful leave, and went back to his hotel; elated, yet shuddering. If his motive should be discovered?

Yet, a man will willingly endure a great deal for a quarter of a million of money, and brother Joseph's quarter of a million had taken root in George's soul. He would rather have died than have surrendered it.

Every now and again it occurred to him that it might be that all the trouble he had taken, and the danger he had incurred, were unnecessary; but his fears goaded him, and the thinnest shadow of dreadful chance struck terror to his soul. He returned now to the Black Country, and was

tried by the agony of the law's delay for three dreary weeks. At the end of that time he received an official note informing him that his prayer was granted, and that, except for the necessary publication through the ordinary official channels, which, of course, could not possibly be dispensed with, his desire for secrecy would be respected. The reservation stabbed him like a knife.

"Theer's nothin' for it," he said, sitting in his armchair and staring stupidly at the fire, "but to get him out o' the country wi' a rush, an' so ha' done wi' it."

The official note inclosed an authorisation to visit the prisoner, and intimated besides that the revised term of the prisoner's durance would expire in a month's time within a day or two.

"I'll goo an' see him," said George, "this very day." But, as he rose in blind haste to forward his scheme, that dreadful swimming in the head from which he had twice or thrice suffered came back upon him. He saw nothing but a silvery mist, with splashes in it of alternate ink and fire, and he sank into his seat and lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XVII.

THERE was a pious warder in the gaol in which young George was confined, and one night, as he locked the prisoner up, he threw in a word in season.

"There's a worse prison than this, young man," said the pious warder.

"What's that?" said the prisoner. He was a good deal reduced by prison diet, for one thing, and he was not too proud to speak to anybody. And besides, except the chaplain, nobody had ever offered him a civil word. So he answered quite briskly, and in a tone of interest, "What's that?"

"Hell!" said the pious warder, and closed the door.

George, as this theological bullet struck him, leaped to his feet and cried out to the unhearing walls and the iron door, though he took care not to speak until the door was closed.

"Insolent cad!" Then, being weakened by prison diet—for as yet he was new to its effects, and had not even begun to experience its tonic influence—he sat down by his little bit of gas-light, and began to cry. The way of transgressors is hard, and he felt the hardship without fully recognising himself as a transgressor. He *was* ill-used. It was such a ridiculous absurdity to

suppose that a man in his position, and with his prospects, should have meant to rob anybody of three hundred pounds. A fool as gross 'as ignorance made drunk could scarcely think it—the idea was so monstrously and palpably absurd. And yet people actually *did* think it, and as a consequence he was here, condemned to two years' imprisonment, a felon, branded for life, lost, friendless. And nobody pitied him, nobody thought how horribly unlucky he was; nobody guessed how honourable and high-minded he really was at bottom. If he wept under the burden of these reflections and the shock of the warder's insolence, what wonder?

Since his entry to the gaol he had been admirably subordinate, partly through policy, and perhaps a little because he was prone by nature to avoid resisting strong things. Here authority, though calm, was strong enough to have cowed a much more pugnacious nature. George's valour was essentially discreet, and he made a model prisoner. The Chaplain had heard good reports of him, and, as luck would have it, he paid his first real visit to his new charge whilst George was crying. He had gone formally into his cell once before, and had dropped a text or two, but now he came prepared with all the weapons of Gospel agriculture, to plough and sow and harrow the criminal's soul.

The door opened, and the forger sat with his

head in his hands, weeping. The door closed again, and the Chaplain and the prisoner were alone. George knew him by his legs, and had no need to look up to recognise him. The Chaplain's were the only black broadcloth trousers in the prison.

"I am glad," said the Chaplain, "to find you softened by your chastisement."

The prisoner's gorge arose, but he said nothing. Softened? Why should anybody be glad to find him softened, victim of injustice and ill-fortune as he was?

"The time already afforded you for reflection," pursued the Chaplain, "has been brief, and that which remains before you is long. I implore you to make good use of it."

Now, there was a double insult, and George was quick to see and feel both edges of it.

"The object of punishment"—so the Chaplain flowed on—"is twofold. In one aspect it is strictly punitive. In another it tends to reformation. Here you have time to consider your past misdeeds, and to make and strengthen holy resolutions for the future."

"Canting hound!" said the prisoner to himself. "What sort of resolutions would he make if he were here?"

But the Chaplain habitually set the weapons of Gospel agriculture to work on stony ground, and would not have been much discouraged even

if the prisoner had spoken his thoughts aloud. He went on, business-like, with truths trite enough, but no less true on that account, to set the enormity of the prisoner's offence before him. Then he told him how unhappy he was, and at this period in his harangue the hearer's tears fell fast. He told the miserable George how he had sacrificed the substance of happiness and prosperity for the mere shadow or a fleeting joy; and when George sobbed in answer, the Chaplain warmed to his text and grew nearly eloquent. And the more eloquent the Chaplain grew, the more the criminal was affected; and the more the prisoner was affected, the more the Chaplain was stirred to effort. He was a thoroughly good man, pious and in earnest, and we all like an appreciative listener. The criminal cried at the exhortation, and the exhorter naturally felt well disposed to him, as you would feel to me if I laughed at your comic story, and shed tears at your strokes of narrative pathos, brother-novelist.

George himself began to think the Chaplain, within limits, an appreciative sort of man; and when, beneath the prisoner's tears and its own eloquence, the exhorting voice began to shake and to grow a little husky, the criminal murmured that he felt the value of sympathy, and would think of the good advice which had been given him.

The Chaplain in parting shook him by the hand and left a tract behind him. That sort of literature had never had any charms for the criminal until now, but anything is better than nothing, and he read the tract and took an interest in it, and read it so often, for sheer want of something better to do, that he knew it almost by rote when the good man next visited him. And if on future occasions he humbugged the Chaplain, he began by humbugging himself. Every man but the greatest has a little of the chameleon in him, and takes his colour from surroundings. Young curates coming up to the town and meeting old college chums in bachelor chambers have been known in the course of a day or two to throw off something of the restraint of habitual piety, to drink bitter beer once again, and to take a bashful hand at six-penny napoleon. It is within living memory that the late Mr. Peace told the chaplain of the gaol within which he suffered the final penalty of the law that he—Peace—would show the Chaplain how a Christian could die. Impressionable human nature! — not altogether deceived, nor more than nine-tenths deceiving.

And so, on a sudden, this young man became quite a model of Christian propriety. He forgave John Keen and all his other enemies; he admitted the justice of the sentence which had been passed upon him, and out of the depths of his regenera-

tion he wrote a letter to Dinah, a letter so pious and edifying that the Chaplain consented to let it go, and, by the Governor's permission, posted it with his own hands. In that epistle he set before his supposed sister the manner in which he had become converted from the error of his ways, and besought her also to seek the cleansing fountain in which he had been sanctified. Poor Dinah was spared the misery of reading this effusion. The local postmaster returned it to the gaol, marked in red ink, "Gone. Left no address."

No. 32, B Corridor, became a sort of model prisoner, and was in the main treated with great kindness. The pious warder even went so far as to supplement his rations—against all rule—with bottles of warm tea and wedges of pork pie, the which 32 of B Corridor gratefully received and disposed of. And when at length, beneath the seal of official secresy, the inquiries prompted by old George Bushell were made by the Home Department, the Governor and the Chaplain were both honestly pleased that a young fellow who showed such sincere desire for amendment seemed likely to have another chance in the world. Their reports were eminently favourable to the prisoner, who, as a matter of course, knew nothing of the negotiations.

The benevolent employer, awaking from his swoon, found himself chilled to the very marrow, and so weak that he could scarcely rise from his

chair. For a while he was not sure that he had not fallen asleep after reading the official letter; but as he grew clearer, he remembered that he had fallen suddenly back with an awful swimming in the head, and his fears once more got hold of him. Four-and-twenty years ago and more, so his dull conscience now recalled him to the truth, he had begun to plot against his nephew, only with the faintest hope that the plot might be successful. All these years Nemesis had slumbered, and now was upon him. He was going to be punished for his wickedness. These visitations frightened him, for they came in answer to his sins. Well, then, he would make all straight and right again—would make full restitution—when he died. In the meantime, surely, no Deity could be displeased by his benevolence to a young man who had so shamefully betrayed his trust. He would be good to young Banks, and free him from prison, and give him a new chance in the world, and money to start with, two hundred pounds instead of one—an ample provision. And then he would make a new will, and in place of founding the great Busheil Hospital and Institute in its projected entirety, he would bequeath everything his brother Joseph had left behind him to Dinah, its rightful owner. Surely, thought the old sinner, tremulous now and full of fears that was enough to do. Surely that put a new complexion on the matter, and made his plot pious. If his own con-

science could not see a flaw in the new scheme, might he not believe or hope that the flaw went unseen? There was one thing about which he was absolutely certain. He had never meant to be a wicked man, and if circumstances tempted him too strongly to be resisted now, it was in his power to do justice at the end. Even in the meantime he was acting benevolently to the criminal George. He, at least, was not at present entitled to a penny of the money, and a year and a half of imprisonment lay before him, apart from the self-excusing, self-accusing old rascal's interference.

I am ashamed to have wasted so many words on so simple an analysis. Everybody knows how to cheat his conscience.

Tremulous still, and looking old and haggard, he began his preparations for his journey. He wrote and despatched instructions to the managing clerk at his offices, with respect to some hitherto unarranged affairs, filled a pocket flask with whisky as a guard against any new attack of faintness, and, walking to the railway station, was borne away. People who met him noticed his haggard pallid looks, and said to one another that old Bushell was ageing fast and beginning to break up. He felt it himself, though he set down much of it to his late continuous anxiety, and looked forward to a rapid recovery when its cause should have disappeared.

The journey was not a lengthy one, and the

sunlight was lying hot and white upon the main street of the country town when he reached it. But now a great reluctance to go near the gaol fell upon him, and he walked down the shady side of the road with new tremors and misgivings, all undefined, and probably the worse to bear on that account. He was unknown to the few unoccupied residents who gazed idly after him, but all faces looked suspicious to him in his timorous mood, and everybody seemed to know his errand. The sexton's statement oppressed him, and he felt what a very awkward thing it was for a man who had a possible sentence of transportation for life hanging over him to put his head inside a gaol. But the thing had to be done, and when the road was quite clear of observers, he advanced to the massive gate—the very gate he had seen in his dream, though he had never beheld it with bodily eyes before—and rang the bell. The echoes went clanging and tingling about the hollow courtyard, and a warder opened a side door and demanded to know his business.

"Tek my card in to the Governor," said old George, with shaky pomposity. "I'm the bearer of a letter from the Home Seckitary, and I want to see him."

"Walk in, sir," said the warder respectfully, and the visitor obeyed. How the startled echoes clanged and tingled through the hollow court when the warder slammed the solid little door!

The warder, having called a fellow official, gave him Mr. Bushell's card, with instructions to take it to the Governor; and then, inviting the visitor to be seated, mopped his forehead and said it was a roaster. Old George assented and looked at the ornaments on the wall, all of which were disagreeably suggestive of strong durance. After what seemed a long pause, heavy footsteps set the echoes going in the courtyard again, and the messenger reappeared.

"The Governor's compliments, sir, and will you walk this way."

Out into the open yard, then through a heavy door—which the warder unlocked—into a corridor, then through another door into a lengthier corridor. All the doors, old George noticed with an uncomfortable creepiness in the region of the spine, closed with a snap behind—and now, if the Secretary of State had pierced his plan from the first, how safe they had him! That was all nonsense, and he knew it, but he shivered at it. He was relieved when, having traversed the whole length of the gaol, they came upon another open space, turfed and not paved this time, and beyond it the Governor's house, looking solid and prison-like, but still a little more cheerful and less terrible than the living grave behind.

The Governor was not in the least official in appearance—a grey, elderly gentleman, with a cordial look and manner. He received his visitor

with something more than courtesy, and shook hands as if he were pleased so to see him. The fact was that he had heard of old George's amazing goodness, and, being himself of a kindly nature, was much impressed by the story. It is not every day in the year that a man who has been so ill-repaid for the affection wasted on a *protégé* chooses to act in this Christian spirit of forgiveness.

"At present," said the Governor, "the young man is of course unprepared. Perhaps, Mr. Bushell, you would like to carry him the news of your own benevolence, eh?"

"I should like to see him, certainly," said old George, "an' maybe to say a solemn word to him. You see, Mister, what a mistake it 'ud be if he was to be let out impenitent after all." He was so falling into the part, that he began to regard all sides of it quite naturally. Those fears of possible detection had been purely nervous, and had not assailed his reason: or at least he told himself so, now, when he saw the Governor so friendly. "They was all mere foolery, of course," said he to himself.

"Well, you know, Mr. Bushell," said the Governor with a half-laugh, "a prisoner's penitence is a thing the quality of which it is very difficult to judge until you see it actually worn and tried outside. 'The devil was sick' — *you* know. And I dare say," added the Governor,

"that while the sickness lasted, his penitence was real enough. That's the way with 'em here."

"Ah!" said George, wondering what the man was talking about; "so I should suppose. So I should suppose."

"At the same time, I must tell you that the Chaplain thinks very favourably of the young man."

"Ah?" said George. "That's well. That's well."

The schemer's hair was grey, his face was coming to be a good deal seamed and furrowed, it was pale just now, and had a worn look on it; immobile as the old rascal was, it was plainly to be seen that he had suffered. His dull, slow speech, his almost expressionless front, with only that look of late pain upon it, had more effect than could easily have been fancied. The man looked so simple and genuine, not at all like a schemer against his *protégé*. A woodenly benevolent, good, stupid, slow creature! There is even a mournful admiring tenderness, a tinge of pathos, in one's thoughts concerning him.

"Would you like to see the Chaplain?" asked the Governor.

"Well," said George deliberately, "I don't know as it mightn't be as well."

"Or perhaps," said the Governor, "you'd like to see the young fellow himself first?"

"Well," returned George, "I don't know as I

shouldn't. Yes," he added with a most involuntary sigh, "I'll get that over."

"Very well, Mr. Bushell. Come this way, if you please."

George followed the Governor back into the gaol, and as he did so the nervous feelings he had been able to despise a few minutes ago returned upon him. It was not easy to despise them now. Suppose there should be something in them, after all! Old George in gaol precincts, with the knowledge of his own criminal acts within him, was not the man to be happy in his mind. A warder went before them unlocking the doors, and fastening them behind, and at last he and they came to Corridor B and then to door 32, and this being opened revealed the figure of a man at whom the benevolent intruder looked with no recognition. The Rightful Heir, with sleek cropped head and clean-shaven face, looked up and knew his late employer; but the young George was so altered by his prison dress, and by the prison shears and razor, that the old man might have looked at him for five minutes without guessing who he was. The prisoner sprang to his feet, and, with head a little bent, stood in attitude of attention.

"Banks," said the Governor, "this gentleman desires to speak to you. I hope that what he has to say will make a proper impression on you."

Now, the prisoner was making rapid progress

towards spiritual perfection. He had forgiven all his enemies, theoretically, and he had cultivated all his own evil passions out of himself. For a month or two past he had been quite saintly, and had taken the deepest interest in his own spiritual symptoms. Yet he did rile up a little at old George's intrusion, and as the intruder walked into his cell the criminal's newly-holy soul went bilious on a sudden. For he remembered yet—he had never meant to swindle his employer—he had only tried to borrow for a month or two without asking leave, and he had been very harshly treated. He had prayed to be able to forgive old George, but human nature is fallible, and when he saw him he had no forgiveness for him.

"Do you wish your interview to be absolutely private, Mr. Bushell?" asked the Governor, withdrawing him a little towards the door.

"I think I'd rather," said old George slowly. He meant to finish there, but perhaps a shade of disapproval or disappointment in the Governor's face, perhaps a half-frightened desire to propitiate him, made him remould the phrase. "I think I'd rather as you was with us."

The Governor was a little curious, and the situation was interesting.

"I shall be most happy," he returned. "Wait there," he said to the warder, "until I tap the door, and then unlock it."

He closed the cell-door with a snap, and old George started at it. It had a strange quick sound upon the ear, that click of a prison lock, as I have before noticed, and even an undetected criminal may very well jump a little at it. But disturbed as he was, he recognised his private secretary now, and began to string himself up for the work with lay before him.

"Mr. Banks," he said with laboured deliberation, "I've come to see you on a most important matter—a matter as concerns you very deeply. You've had time, sence you was here, to think things over, an' I hope you've done it, an' as you've begun to see things in their proper light."

The criminal with downward glance murmured to the effect that he hoped so and believed so. He was near the truth in one respect, though unconsciously—for he loathed old George, and trembled with anger at the sight of him.

"I'm willin' to hope so, also," said the Wrongful Heir, "willin' an' eager. I'm glad to hear from the Governor of this gaol as the Chaplain believes as you're sincerely penitent."

"I trust I am," said the Rightful Heir.

"I'm here as your sincere friend, Mr. Banks," the Wrongful Heir resumed. "I dare say as you've thought many-a-time what an ill-judged thing it was you did, let alone the wickedness on it. I suppose, now, as you've found the punishment pretty heavy?"

"I have deserved it all, sir," said detected criminality, playing to the Governor, but his inward speech was unreportable.

The undetected criminal flowed on.

"You've had time afore now to think o' what you've parted with through folly. Your chances was bright. You'd ha' been well-to-do an' respected now if it hadn't ha' been for that. You'd very like ha' been settled down an' married afore to-day, for I know what your prospects was."

The detected criminal began to weep, for mingled rage and pity of himself. The undetected criminal continued.

"I'm glad to see as you feel your position that keen, Mr. Banks."

Oh, the surging rage and self-pity in the little soul! A storm in a tea-cup! Ay, but the vessel trembled, and was like to break with it.

"I took a likin' to you from the first," old George went on, encouraged by the effect of his own oratory, and somehow, in a dim sort of way, feeling himself wronged and magnanimous, "an' you can't help allowin' as I did my best to push you for'ards. I was forced to prosecute, because it was a public dooty, but you've been punished, an' I'm not desirous of no revenge upon you, not though I used to like you, an' you played me fause."

What was this? the prisoner asked himself

with a heart that fluttered in his breast, like a flag in the wind. What was it?

"So I've used my influence," said the old scoundrel, "with the 'Ome Seckitary, an' he's consented to redooce your sentence."

The young scoundrel dropped on the side of his bed, which stood half-way retired in a niche in the wall. His head and the wall came pretty sharply in contact, or he would probably have fainted with amazement and the revulsion of his feeling towards old George. He could scarce believe his eyes and ears.

"Banks," said the Governor, who was moved within by this strange interview, though he was too self-possessed to show it, "I trust that never so long as you live you will allow the memory of this generous forgiveness to fade from your mind."

The prisoner was too amazed and agitated to say a word.

"I allays liked you," said old George, "an' I allays took a interest in you. An' now I've empl'yed my influence along wi' my friend Sir Jonas Croesus,"—this had, as it was meant to have a certain weight with the Governor,— "an' I've had an interview along of the 'Ome Seckitary. In a month's time you'll be set free, an' then you must try an' see if you can't act wiser an' better."

Young George slid from the bedside where

he sat, and kneeling there buried his face in the cheap hard rug which made his counterpane, and wept anew. This forgiveness really broke him. It took him by surprise and by storm, and his sobs were torn up by the roots. He *had* been a scoundrel—he confessed it inwardly, at last—he *had* been a fool, he acknowledged it. For a minute or two the burden of his new-born gratitude was hard to endure. The Governor was affected, and blew his nose repeatedly, waving a loud-coloured silk handkerchief about in a way which revealed, whilst it was meant to disguise, his inward agitation. Old George stood there wooden and cold, but even he was scarcely self-possessed, as you may easily conceive. But neither of his auditors yet knew how far the benevolent creature's kindness had carried him, and his grand *coup* had yet to be made, so far as they were concerned.

"Now," he continued, when the prisoner's sobs had grown less violent and the Governor had ceased to blow his nose, "this country's about played out for you, Mr. Banks, or at least I'm very much afeard it is. But it 'ud be cruel i'stead o' bein' kind to turn you loose o' the world again without a prospict. Now, s'pose I give you another start i' the world, what do you say to goin' out t' Australia an' tryin' to begin afresh? I believe as you are penitent, an' I hope pros-

perous times 'll wait upon you theer. Now, what do you say t' Australia?"

What was young George likely to say to Australia under the circumstances? I was about to say that he jumped at the chance: in reality, he crawled at it, for he turned upon his knees and made at the undetected swindler as if to embrace his legs, and had not old George retired precipitately behind the Governor, he would have done it.

"God bless you, Mr. Bushell!" he cried in a voice shaky with many sobs. "God bless you, sir! God bless you!"

"I say the same, sir, as this poor fellow here," cried the Governor, with the silk handkerchief in full play again. "Yes, sir. Damn it all, sir, I say the same! You are a worthy man, Mr. Bushell. I am proud, sir, to have met you."

"Thank you," said old George, woodenly, and the two shook hands, whilst the forgiven forger crawled back to his bedside and wept afresh. It was a moving scene, and the practical exponent of Christian charity, as he stood there, shook at the fancy—

"If they was to find me out, after all!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I SHALL give you letters of introduction, Mr. Banks, to my old correspondents in Melbourne, in

Australia," said George. "I'm afeard I shall have to tell the truth about you, because I don't rightly think as it 'ud be honourable to deceive 'em. I shall give you two hundred pound, an' a outfit, an' your passage-money."

The criminal was broken indeed at this, and even the Governor, if there had been anybody to look at him, would have been seen to be visibly affected.

"I trust an' hope," continued George, "that being thus provided, Mr. Banks, you'll ha' no more temptation to depart from the straight road. It's that alone as leads to prosperity an' happiness, an' I do hope you'll tek it."

Whilst he spoke thus, old George's conscience twinged him faintly, but then he remembered that in *his* case the obstacle to honesty had been quite insuperable lately. And at the beginning he had never meant to swindle anybody. He had only helped his errant nephew, Joe, as he was now helping Joe's son—and heir.

The criminal promised upon his knees, with tears and gaspings which almost made his speech inarticulate.

"This gentleman," said old George, indicating the Governor, "'ull let me know, an' let you know when the release which has been gi'en to you is to come about. I shall hope to meet you here, Mr. Banks, an' to accompany you on your journey, an' aboard ship I shall place the sum I've men-

tioned in your hands. I trust as you won't think as I'm a-tekin' undoo precautions, sir," he added, appealing to the Governor.

"I think your whole scheme most praiseworthy and admirable, sir," cried the Governor, "since you are so good as to ask me my opinion of it."

"Well, sir," said George, his mission being now accomplished, "you'll let me know the date at which this young man's sentence 'll expire?"

"I can tell you that at once," said the Governor, "and as I am authorised to inform the prisoner, I may as well tell you here. This is the 29th. On the 28th of next month, being Monday, he will be discharged at noon."

"I shall be here," said old George with cold desperation, "to meet him." He turned to the criminal and said "Good-bye". The youngster took his hand and kissed it, and wept above it with inarticulate gasps of benediction and thanksgiving, until his benefactor lost patience and took it away. The warder came in answer to the Governor's summons, and released them, and young George was left to his reflections. They were bitter, but sweetened by touches of gratitude and hope and new resolve. He would be a new man, and in that distant land to which he was bound he would lead a frugal, honourable, and industrious life. Mr. Bushell was right. England was played out for him, and he could never more hold his

head up where people had known him. But in a new land he could take a fresh start, and nobody need know of his criminality. Thereabouts in his reflections a chill fear fell upon him. Mr. Bushell, his saviour and benefactor though he was, spoke of the need of telling his whole story to his agents in Melbourne. Would he, in that case, send the letter by post, or entrust it to his own hand? If it were entrusted to him, it would be easy to lose it; and with the upspringing of that defensive fancy in his mind, gratitude began to cool a little, and reflections about his own future to take the place of it. But the fit was so hot that it could not cool down all in a second, and before the young man could resolve to burke that letter in case it were entrusted to him, he was assailed by gust after gust of grateful emotion, and this condition lasted him for a week at least. Then he began to feel an amazing flutter about his approaching liberty. The prison barber had left off trimming and shaving him, and he used to feel his hair and rejoice to find it long enough to get a grip of. Looking-glasses have no part in gaol economy. Before his waiting month was out, his hair, which grew rapidly, was long enough not to look remarkable, and he knew that he was pale enough to pass for one who had had a recent fever. At the first blush of his new resolves he had determined, amongst other things, on a very strict adherence to veracity. He made

up his mind that nothing in the world should tempt him to deviate by a hair's-breadth from the truth. But before long he began to see what hard measure that was. He *must* lie a little. Necessity was laid upon him. How could he confess to anybody the real reason of his pallor, or account with accuracy for the shortness of his hair? That would be suicidal. He meant to be religious — he really meant to be religious, and the best of Christians — but did religion exact so rigid and even ridiculous a discipline? He thought not.

The Chaplain was often with him in these last days of his imprisonment; reading and praying with him, and doing his best to build up in the departing gaol-bird those principles of honour and justice the want of which had carried him there. He was not wholly excused from work, but he was gently treated, and the Governor, being interested in him, set him to do certain odd jobs about his garden, and relieved his own kindly feelings by giving his labourer an occasional surreptitious supply of bread-and-cheese and beer. Circumstances alter cases. Fancy George Banks finding bread-and-cheese and beer luxurious! Think of him accepting the patronising presentation of it, and being grateful!

He was less grateful, perhaps, for this slackening of his chains than he would have been without the assurance of approaching liberty, and in a

while the torment and agony of hope left him no room to think of mere gratitude to anybody. Time had never so dragged on his hands as now; but howsoever long it seemed in coming, the hour came at last — and with it, the man. At stroke of noon on Monday the 28th, old George led young George through the prison gates and into the street, where a hack-coach awaited them and drove them to a distant railway station. The Chaplain had prayed with his departing guest that morning, and had given him much fervent advice. The Governor bade him "Farewell" kindly and with hope. The dress in which he had been arrested was returned to him, and he was habited like himself once more.

He had wept anew with mingled feelings of all sorts at the parson's exhortations; and when his late employer came to relieve him, he felt amazingly affectionate towards him. The released convict felt that he loved old George. He looked at his unmeaning countenance, worn and strained and battered with the last six or seven months of misery; he looked at it through his tears, and venerated its owner. The good man he was—the forgiving practical Christian, who did good to one who had despitefully used him! In brief, the poor cad was quite melted and broken upon this occasion, and vowed amendment with all his little heart and soul. The past scarified him — his bygone hopes, his wasted chances; these make

scourges for all of us at one time or another, and surely here was a time for a man's own hand to lay the lash on heavily.

"I can never repay you, sir, for your kindness," said the young man brokenly as they drove away.

Old George had his own troubles, and their weight pressed sorely on him just then.

"Say no more about it," he answered. "Dry them eyes o' yourn, an' be a man, Mr. Banks."

He was horribly afraid of being observed, not for any special reason, but in a general way. He was horribly afraid all round—afraid of being followed and taken back, afraid of being met by somebody who might somehow know his relationship with the released prisoner, afraid that the sexton at Waston Church was just at that moment discovering the loss of the certificate. It was a nervous enterprise altogether for a man of old George's mental build. He wondered darkly within himself whether such an expedient had ever been hit upon before, and he wondered at himself for having hit upon it. Whatever he thought of was perplexed, and entangled in his mind with misgivings and fears. It was not unnatural that he should, under these unpleasant circumstances, begin to hate young George his companion. For it was as clear as day that, if that young scoundrel had not been a scoundrel, old George would never have experienced any of

these troubles; Dinah would never have made her appeal to him, and he would never have known of his secretary's heirship to Joe Bushell. Yet, though he did begin to hate, he had his part to play, and his part was one of gentle friendship and kindly consideration. That was a *rôle* which he would have found difficult at any time, and now he felt it to be growing intolerable. George's tears gave him a chance for a partial outbreak.

"Mr. Banks," he said severely, "I'm a-beginnin' to regret a'ready as I took any trouble about you. You don't seem to have no sort of a man's heart in you. Be ayther a man *or* a mouse, will you? My Blessid! It's enough to turn your stomach to see a man a-goin' on so."

Thus roughly adjured, George made an effort. He had been crying all day up till now, and it was not easy for him to subdue himself. He had read somewhere the words, "It is a terrible thing when manhood weeps," and he got some melodramatic comfort out of that reflection even whilst his tears were flowing. For, though a small creature, he was complex, and had room in him for all manner of conflicting ideas and feelings at the same time, so that he had cried partly because he really couldn't help it to begin with, and partly because it was the feeling thing to do, and showed that he had a sensitive and emotional organisation. His eyes and nose were red and

swollen with his tears, and his beard and moustache were as yet scrubby and stubble-like; so that old George, looking upon him, saw him in an aspect more and more unfavourable. The young villain had at least been personable, and now, confound him! he was growing positively repulsive to look at. And in spite of this, the elder scoundrel had to counterfeit some sort of interest and even of affectionate regard, for a day or two, until he could see him aboard ship for Melbourne, and have him safely dismissed the country.

Mr. Banks being reduced by his deliverer's admonition to an occasional gasp and snuffle of emotion, found in little time other things than his own emotions to think of. The question of the proposed letters of introduction occurred to him, and he began to wonder afresh. Would they be entrusted to his hand or forwarded by the mail? If they were forwarded by the mail, would it not be better to escape the stigma they carried with them — say, by a change of name, and by presenting himself in the search for employment elsewhere? Mr. Bushell had promised him two hundred pounds, and that, though not a fortune, was a good round sum of money to begin the world with. If work were to be had at all, a man of his presence, his business capacity and experience, was bound to be able to get on, and it would be suicidal to set such a millstone about

his own neck as the proclamation of himself as a released felon would be sure to hang there. He would go this once into the house of the idol—he would be disingenuous in this respect only, and after that he would be good and true and honest. He had had a roughish time of it; he had lost almost everything in the world; but for his employer's amazing and unlooked-for benevolence, he had lost all; and he was not going to disregard such a lesson as he had received; how was it possible that he could? But this particular new crime was necessary. He *must* promise whatever he was asked to promise, and then, being free, he must act for the best. After all, he would be only fulfilling his employer's desires of him, and doing his best to preserve an honest reputation. It was a pity to be thus forced and compelled into a course which he wished to loathe and abandon, and he was quite sure that, if the new baseness had not been necessary, he would never have dreamed of committing it. If a poor devil is forced to lie, how can he help lying? Everybody must admit the cogency of young George's reasoning.

The situation was singular: the young man chokeful of gratitude to the old man who was robbing him—the old man passing as a benefactor to the man he was swindling on so large a scale. And the young fellow, in the middle of his gratitude and his good resolves, playing the devil

with his own small soul again; and his Christian benefactor looking at him and hating him like poison. Cabby, as he drove, little suspected what a load he carried, for neither of his fares looked like a released felon. Cabby's fancy was that the younger of his passengers had been to see a relative who had misconducted himself. So far as he—the cabman—knew, it was not a habit amongst the classes her Majesty holds in durance to weep on leaving gaol; they did not even weep on going into it, if they were people of average pluck. Then, the Chaplain had shaken hands with young George at the gate with a hearty "Good-bye, Mr. Banks," and both he and the Governor had raised their hats to old George when he parted from them. Like other people, the driver of the hack-carriage theorised, and when he had reached the railway station and had received his fare, he fell into talk with a railway porter, to whom he set forth how that pair was father an' son they wos, an' had been to the county gaol for to see a relation as was quodded theer, an' the young un he was that cut-up he'd been cryin' fit to bust hisself, an' what a pity it was as men as had a chawnce in life should pitch it away voluntary-like, as a man might say. From which utterances on Cabby's part, I am disposed to think that, born in a less fortunate station of life, he might have given his imagination scope professionally, and have become a writer of fiction.

Half-a-crown and a hint to the guard found Mr. Bushell and his grateful protégé an empty compartment in a first-class carriage; and secured privacy all the way to Liverpool. On the journey the elder unfolded his scheme.

"I've wrote a'ready to Melbourne," he said, "an' I've told 'em as I'm a-sendin' you out theer to give you another chance."

"Then," said the rescued one to himself, "I shall not go near your agents in Melbourne." But he only looked at his employer with a meek and stricken air of grateful humbleness.

"I've put it for you as gentle as I could," pursued old George, "an' at the same time as strong as I could. I've told 'em it's my belief as you are to be relied upon, and I've given 'em my guarantee for five hunderd pound. So if you go wrong again, Mr. Banks, you'll be black indeed. You'd be a-robbin' me again, an' I don't think you'd find the heart to do that—be as bad as you might—after what I've done for you."

At this George the younger wept afresh.

"I implore you to believe me, sir," he answered. "I would rather cut off my right hand than wrong you again by a farthing." He meant it, but he did not mean to go near Messrs. Nally and Tulson, of Melbourne, for all that.

"I believe you," said old George stolidly, "or else I shouldn't be actin' as I am a-actin'. That

you may be sure on, Mr. Banks, I repose implicit confidence in your future well-doin'."

It crossed his mind grimly that it might be no bad thing for him if young George turned criminal again out there. He wished him nothing worse than a new detection and a life's imprisonment. Hang him, the pestiferous thieving young Rightful Heir! It came natural to hate him.

"I shall find you a outfit," said Mr. Bushell, "as I've promised. I shall pay your passage out, an' I shall put two hunderd pound in your possession when you start, so as you'll have no 'casion to feel yourself tempted again. An' now, the world's afore you, Mr. Banks. Use it well, an' it'll use you well."

"How can I ever repay you, sir?" said the deeply-affected George.

"Stop that snivellin'," cried the old man angrily. "Be a man, an' try to be worthy o' my goodness to you."

"I will, sir," protested George; "I will, indeed."

"Do, then!" said the elder; and after that they continued their journey in silence for the most part.

The appearance of the released convict was so peculiar by reason of his tears, that on his arrival at Liverpool his benefactor bought a pair of dark glasses for him with shades at the sides,

and insisted upon his wearing them to hide his eyes. The youngster submitted gratefully, for he felt nervous under the pressure of strange glances. He put himself under the hands of a barber, and when chin and cheeks were cleared of their stubble, he began to look presentable again. There was a suspicion of cold about his nose; one might have set down the swollen aspect of that feature and the pallor of his cheeks to influenza. The two criminals took a private sitting-room and a double-bedded sleeping apartment at the hotel, and old George locked his companion in the bed-room whilst he himself went out to make inquiries respecting the sailing of a ship for Melbourne. Finding that a first-class steam-vessel started on the morrow, calling at Queenstown only, and that there was still a state-room vacant, he secured young George's place, and then returning, released him, and took him out in the evening hurriedly to buy an outfit. For once in his life, he disregarded money. He felt reckless, and forcing himself to assume an air and voice of kindness, he gave the exile *carte blanche*.

"Get what you want, an' get it good," he said; and his young friend obeyed him. The outfitter kept one of those monstrous modern establishments at which you can buy anything, and would sell you a cradle or a coffin with equal willingness, and anything you might want in your journey out of one into the other. A

tailor measured young George, and a man in the boot and shoe department measured him, and the customer ordered freely, as he would have done if the money to pay for them had been his own. For there was old George at his elbow:—

“You’ll want this, Mr. Banks, sha’n’t you?”

“Do you think so, sir?” he would ask.

“Certainly. You must ha’ that,” and so on, until the repentant wretched George’s eyes were moist again behind his darkened glasses, and he had to blow the tear-swollen nose to hide his feelings.

Before bed-time a vast chest and two port-manteaus, crammed with articles of apparel, arrived at the hotel, and Mr. Bushell paid the bill presented—and paid it, too, without even an inward murmur. The released felon wondered at his generosity, as well he might. It was unheard-of and almost beyond believing, though his own eyes saw it. Ah! what had he lost by making himself unworthy of the service of so good a master! It had been actually said in his hearing at one time that old Bushell would probably leave him a slice of his fortune, and he believed now that it most certainly would have been so. Yet, through it all, the elder’s manner to the man on whom he heaped these coals of fire was cold and forced, and wooden beyond words. There was something puzzling in it, had old

George's manner been natural; as it was, the situation was almost inexplicable. But the exile was too content with his own astounding good fortune, and too full of gratitude and excitement, to puzzle himself at present over this singular problem.

The two slept in the room, and the schemer kept zealous watch over his charge every moment until the hour for retiring. Then he locked the bedroom door and put the key beneath his own pillow, and the two began to undress slowly and awkwardly. Young George, valiant in his new resolves, knelt down at the bedside, and the respectable benevolent old villain could do no other than follow his example, and being in posture for worship, he tried to go through some form of prayer, but the words stuck hard, and his head whirled. How, he thought, if he died upon his knees, defying God in that awful and presumptuous way? and at the stroke of that sudden fear he rose and began to grope about in a twilight splashed with blots of ink and fire; until young George, having finished his devotions, rose and found his benefactor wandering with vague outstretched hands in the middle of the chamber, and in much alarm helped him to a chair.

"Are you ill, Mr. Bushell?" he asked.

"I bain't well, Mr. Banks," murmured old George hoarsely; "I'm very far from well."

He would leave Dinah everything, and let her know her son's whereabouts. But he could not part with his money until—"till death do us part." The phrase came into his mind and chilled him strangely. He was defrauding "the widow and the fatherless." That was another phrase which laid a chilly and discomfoting finger on him. The Bible made *them* sacred, he fancied. If he died before that will was made and everything thus set straight again, he felt himself in peril. But the human conscience is conformable to reason, and after all he was acting very kindly to a man who had treated him very ill. And if young George got his money in the end, it would be more than he deserved.

Once in bed, old George applied himself to his pocket-flask in the darkness, and got some comfort out of it, though but little. One of his discomforts was that he dared not toss and tumble, since he dreaded to reveal his own uneasy soul. Nemesis comes upon us in odd ways at times. This may seem a small affair; but if you tried it through a night, you would find it mount into an agony. To lie there ill at ease, longing to move, restless, and not dare to move, to catch his breath and clutch the bed-clothes with his weak sweating fingers, lest he should groan out aloud; and all the time to stare accusing conscience in the face, and the coarse hell that ignoble and ignorant natures fear hereafter—was it a little thing? A

hundred times that night the old scoundrel thought the game scarcely worth the candle. And yet, how could he give his money up to a man who was ignorant of the fact that he owned it, and who, besides, was already overwhelmed with gratitude!

THE END OF VOL. I.

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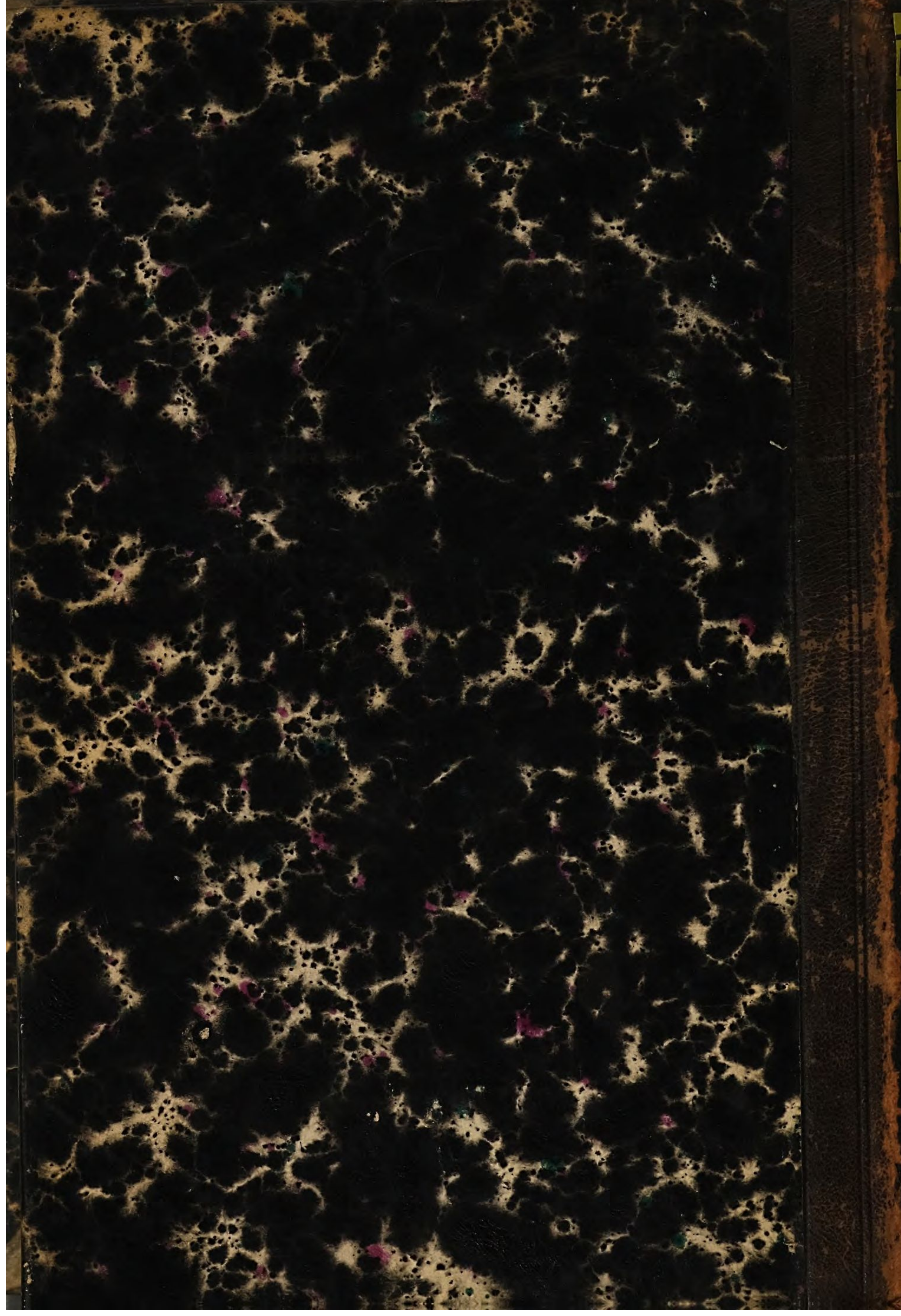
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